

PlayStation2 | GameCube | Xbox | PC | GBA | Arcade | Retro

RETRO
AMSTRAD CPC 464
And you thought the Xbox was big…

FEATURE
MOTION CAPTURE
Breathing life into videogame characters

180 PAGES OF EVOLUTIONARY GAMING

FULL REVIEWS
- R-TYPE FINAL [PS2]
- XGRA: EXTREME-G RACING ASSOCIATION [PS2/XB/GC]
- REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION [PC]
- INITIAL D: SPECIAL STAGE [PS2]
- VIEWTIFUL JOE [GC]
- DINO CRISIS 3 [XB]
- JET SET RADIO [GBA]
- FUTURAMA [PS2/XB]

PREVIEWED
THE SIMS 2
From the cradle to the grave, EA's talking 'bout an evolution


eMag

As we get older the lustre of videogames dims, perhaps because everyday life encroaches upon the time that used to be occupied by simpler pleasures. Those of us who have graduated from *Pong* through the 8-bit days and to the present have lived through a supersonic evolution in gaming that could not have been foreseen as we first plugged in that Binatone. Maybe it's hard to maintain the excitement that younger gamers hold and it's certainly difficult to sustain perspective. As with many things, it's easy to look back fondly to the days when life (and gaming) was much less complicated.

We hope that **games™** is helping those who are feeling a little jaded by offering both an appreciation of the games that we used to play and the very best games of the present and the future. So whether you're young or old there should be more than enough here to fuel that excitement.



Simon Phillips, Group Editor





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games tm

ESPAÑA



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Can young Joe jump and kick his way into our homes?
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Unlucky for some perhaps, but Ubi Soft's cel-shaded shooter is looking as though it has brains as well as beauty

NEWS

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

■ Like E3 but without the sunshine or flight socks.

SONY AND NINTENDO HIT EARLS COURT IN STYLE, BUT MICROSOFT DOESN'T TURN UP FOR THE PARTY

NO-SHOW AT THE BIG SHOW



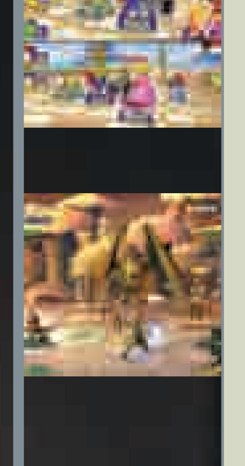
It may be considered E3's poorer relation, but that doesn't mean that Sony and Nintendo won't be showing off some extremely promising titles at this year's ECTS (European Computer Trade Show). Unsurprisingly, Sony will be dominating the show, thanks to its crowd-pleasing PlayStation Experience event.

"For the second year running, we'll be hosting our PlayStation Experience alongside ECTS," confirmed David Wilson, head of PR for Sony UK. "It will be another major statement about PlayStation and the amazing line-up of games in the pipeline for the coming months. This year's PlayStation Experience will be over twice as big as last year's, with over twice the amount of content, loads more third-party partners, more of everything really."

Perhaps the most interesting news about this year's show is that Nintendo will make a personal appearance (as opposed to simply holding yet another breakfast meeting). "Nintendo will be showing off the most up-to-date versions of forthcoming games for the GameCube and Game Boy Advance with a 40-tonne articulated truck packed with consoles and games," said Shelly Friend, head of PR for Nintendo Europe. "The Nintendo truck will be outside the entrance to ECTS on Brompton Road from Wednesday 27 to Friday 29 August and over 40 consoles within the vehicle's trailer will play host to some of the incredible games coming from Nintendo. The completed version of *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* will also be available to play for the first time ever."

While Nintendo and Sony will be out in force, Microsoft will be keeping a surprisingly low profile. "With regards to ECTS I can confirm that we will not be exhibiting this year, although we will be attending for meetings with retailers and developers," confirmed Marie-Claire Suter, PR for Microsoft UK. "We will be hosting X03, the European Xbox showcase, on 16-17 September. X03 will take place in a fantastic surprise setting and feature some crucial Xbox announcements and the hottest games in the world."

Even though X03 is only a few weeks after ECTS, not having a display at the show seems like a missed opportunity – especially now that Nintendo has revealed its plans. The presence of Sony was never in question, which proves just how closely its finger is on the gaming pulse.



THE CREAM OF THE CROP

This year's ECTS will have some stunning titles on display, and while third-party stalls will have plenty of Xbox titles available, Sony and Nintendo's prominent appearances will be the main focus of the show. Here's a selection of the games we're hoping to try during the three-day event.

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3

PlayStation2

A year at ECTS wouldn't be complete without having to elbow your way past all the other journalists who constantly hog the Konami stand. *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* went down a storm last year and we're expecting similar things with the next stunning instalment.

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

PlayStation2

Never mind the lush cut-scenes or the rather questionable subtitle, this is likely to be our first chance to actually get to grips with Snake's latest adventure. He may have defected to various other consoles over the last year, but Snake is now back where he belongs – we can't wait.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

Multiformat

After a 15-year break (and no, we're not including the first hideous 3D translation) the Prince of Persia is finally back. Ubi Soft and Jordan Mechner have done a fantastic job and we predict that, as at E3, the *Sands Of Time* will be one of the highlights of the show.

XIII

Multiformat

With the recent news that spooky Mulder, aka David Duchovny, will be voicing *XIII*'s amnesiac main character (with support from *Batman*'s Adam West), ECTS will be the perfect excuse to see Ubi Soft's excellent cel-shaded blaster. Considering it was on show last year, it will be interesting to be reminded just how far it's come.

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

GameCube

Now that Nintendo has definitely confirmed that it's going to be at ECTS, there's no way we're going to miss another chance to race around hectic circuits with Mario and his chums. We got a real taste for this at E3, so we're practically drooling at the thought of putting *Double Dash!!* through its paces again.

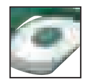
FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

GameCube

It's a four-player RPG, it's by Square and it's on the GameCube – what more could you want? Finally, a near completed version of Square Enix's *Crystal Chronicles* should be available to play. We've already started drawing straws to see who has to sit out on this potentially fantastic RPG.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



YET MORE PSP NEWS

SCEE boss Chris Deering is gradually releasing details about Sony's new handheld. After revealing the expected prices for the games, he's moved on to the cost of the machine itself. "It will certainly be less than a portable DVD player and will more likely be comparable to Nintendo's Game Boy Advance," he said in a recent interview. A price point of around £100 is being suggested, which is great news for gamers as the last thing Sony will want to do is price itself out of the market when the machine launches in Europe next year.



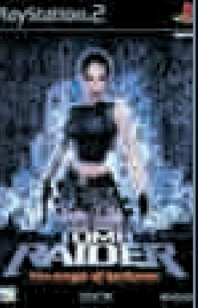


GALAXIES CONQUERS THE INTERNET

Since launching in the US last month, *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided* has attracted more than 125,000 users, making it the most successful launch for any massively multiplayer online game. Simon Jeffrey, president of LucasArts, said the figures "bode well for the ongoing success of the series." Sadly, the PS2 and Xbox versions are currently on hold and the PC release won't be available here until Christmas.



THE INDUSTRY HAS ITS SAY ABOUT THAT BROKEN RELEASE DATE



AHEAD OF THE GAME

After numerous and frustrating delays, Eidos' highly anticipated Lara Croft title – *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness* – was finally ready for a 4 July release date. However, popular high street retailer GAME decided to release the sought-after title much earlier. Whilst this isn't the first time a release date has been breached, it's the sheer blatancy of GAME's decision that seems to have upset various high-profile members of the industry.

"Broken street dates is an issue that's taken very seriously by ELSPA," explained Roger Bennett, director general of the Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association. "As an industry, we're improving in this area but where there is huge demand for a new title, temptation sometimes rules among a few retailers, which then spirals outward as competition is very fierce in this sector."

GAME itself was quick to point out that this was a very unusual situation and that its main concern was its customers. "Our main reason [for breaking the street date] was our customers, and the frustrations that they were experiencing over the delays," said Alex Croft, buying director at GAME. "After months and months of waiting, when we heard that other retailers were going to release early, we took the decision to provide this product to our customers as quickly as we could. We actively support street dates, but in this case not at the expense of losing customers."

Of course, it could be said that with GAME being so prominent within the games retail industry, the loss of a few customers would hardly be of much concern to them. However, as Doug Bone, business development director of Andromeda Entertainment Ltd explains, it's not always that simple. "The launch of the new *Tomb Raider* came about via a series of unique circumstances, even for this industry, and it was not surprising to see the game on sale prior to its official launch," he said. "In defence of GAME, when faced with loyal customers that have been coming in on a



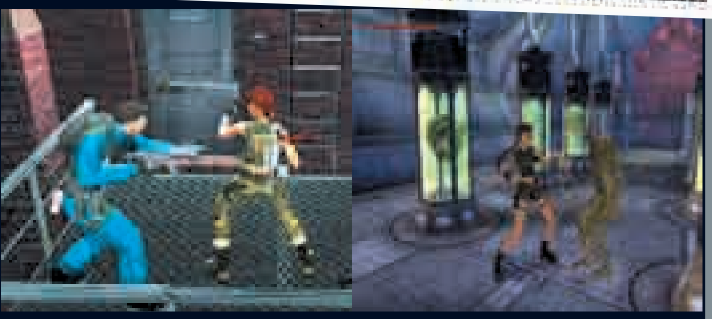
"OTHER RETAILERS WERE GOING TO RELEASE EARLY, SO WE TOOK THE DECISION TO PROVIDE THIS PRODUCT TO OUR CUSTOMERS AS QUICKLY AS WE COULD"

ALEX CROFT, GAME



Streetdate row erupts over Lara

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Some gamers were able to get their hands on Lara before they were meant to…

near daily basis for the latest date, to turn them around and ask them to come back the following Friday (despite having already taken delivery of the stock), is something a retailer with high customer service values should not be asked to consider.

"Whilst I'm certainly not defending any retailers that break a street date, I genuinely feel that in light of this particular title's repeated delays, it would be hypocritical for Eidos to not sympathise with the frustrations that gamers and retailers have felt over the last 12 months."

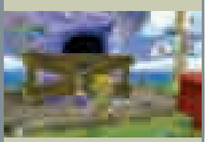
Not surprisingly it's the independent retailers that always suffer. Shaun Johnston of GamesImporter.com is angry at the situation. "GAME has broken the rules and seemingly got away with it without any consequences," he says. "Whereas if an independent did the same, they'd probably get in major trouble. As it currently stands, GAME has a monopoly on the retail market for games, and the current trading practices they have been using are only stifling competition, which, at the end of the day, hurts consumers."

Martin Bean of Video Game Centre in Bournemouth took a more philosophical approach. "The release date was a bit annoying but it didn't affect us too much because as soon as they put it on sale we did the same," he said. "We lost more sales due to the price rather than the release date being broken."

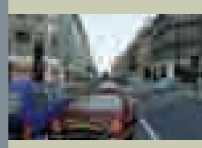
Eidos itself refuses to be drawn into the debate and would offer us little more than a "no comment". With this in mind and the sheer marketing muscle that GAME possesses, it seems unlikely that this matter will be taken any further.

THE WHEEL TURNS…

Of course, this isn't the first time that a retailer has decided to jump the gun when it comes to getting a game on the shelves – indeed, it's a common practice in some cases when it comes to the more prominent games…



The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker
While high-street GAME stores can't be blamed this time, its website can – in an effort to 'maximise sales' GAME.net decided to ship copies of the latest *Zelda* title three days ahead of everyone else.



The Getaway
As reported in issue 2 of **games™**, Sony's long-awaited gangster thriller fell foul of an early release. Blockbuster was the first to crumble (launching a week ahead), closely followed by Woolworths.



SET YOUR PHASERS TO SUE

ACTIVISION UP IN ARMS OVER VIACOM'S LACK OF SUPPORT

Viacom has become the latest in a long list of videogame companies to have a lawsuit filed against it. Amazingly, the reason behind Activision's legal action is down to Viacom not making enough *Star Trek* films. The publisher is extremely disappointed that Viacom has only produced one movie since the companies agreed to work together with the *Star Trek* licence in 1998.

"Activision cannot successfully develop and sell *Star Trek* videogames without the product exploitation and support promised by Viacom," Activision states in its suit. "Viacom has significantly diminished the value of the *Star Trek* licensing rights and breached a fundamental term of its agreement."

Viacom was understandably far from happy and issued the following counter statement: "Activision's allegations are without merit and it appears to be trying to use the courts to renegotiate a deal it made in 1998."

The likes of *Rocky* and *Star Wars* prove you don't need a spanking new licence to sell games and we don't think the blame should squarely lie with Viacom. "Whilst there's a degree of truth to Activision's claims, it's equally fair to suggest that perhaps the code has not always been as strong as the fanbase deserve," says Andromeda's Doug Bone. "Many titles sell incredible volumes within the marketplace without being tied to a key franchise and all for no reason other than because they're good games. Simply put, if the software had always been up to scratch, the sales would have come, regardless of how many people were watching the TV show. For Activision to lay the blame squarely at the feet of Viacom is perhaps not entirely fair."



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



A BLOW FOR JOE

It seems Capcom has underestimated its quirky side-scrolling beat-'em-up *Viewtiful Joe*. Apparently it sold out in Japan in its first week on sale. Japanese gamers received an apology from Capcom, which has now promised to ensure that future stock will be more plentiful. *Viewtiful Joe* reached number five in the Dengeki charts, with nearly 33,000 units sold. We're glad to see that Capcom's new game is doing so well (especially after the poor sales of *P.N.03*) and it'll be interesting to see if that success can be replicated when the game's released here.





SIZE MATTERS

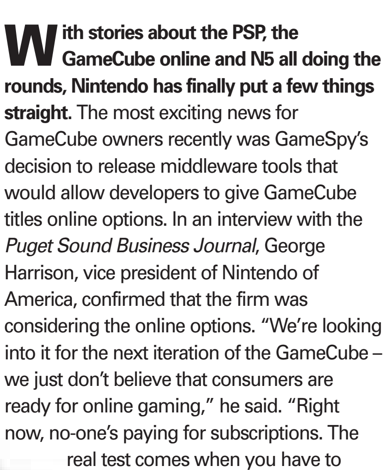
With Sony's PSP on everyone's lips, it was only a matter of time before Nintendo spoke about about its upcoming handheld. Takeshi Kiyuna, a developer for Nintendo, has revealed that its next handheld will feature a much larger screen, with a resolution currently planned to be at least 300 x 200 pixels, and with around 260,000 colours. Nintendo is also hoping to find a designer that can make the screen dust free. Whilst little else has been said on the subject, we're sure Nintendo will trickle out information at the same rate as Sony does about the PSP…





NINTENDO SPEAKS OUT ABOUT ONLINE GAMING, THE PSP AND MORE

NINTENDO'S SECOND WIND



With stories about the PSP, the GameCube online and N5 all doing the rounds, Nintendo has finally put a few things straight. The most exciting news for GameCube owners recently was GameSpy's decision to release middleware tools that would allow developers to give GameCube titles online options. In an interview with the *Puget Sound Business Journal*, George Harrison, vice president of Nintendo of America, confirmed that the firm was considering the online options. "We're looking into it for the next iteration of the GameCube – we just don't believe that consumers are ready for online gaming," he said. "Right now, no-one's paying for subscriptions. The real test comes when you have to start coughing up $15 (£9) per month."

While Nintendo is happy to allow third-party firms to take the 'Cube online, it now seems less likely that we'll see the likes of *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* or *Four Swords* online any time soon. However, with the PSP on the horizon, Nintendo may have more important things to worry about. The firm can't dent the PS2's reputation with its current console and it certainly won't want Sony to dominate the handheld market as well.

According to Nintendo's ex-president, Hiroshi Yamauchi, however, this is not the case. "New product in this industry is important," he said in a recent interview. "Although Nintendo's core business is software, having another developer will allow us to judge the superiority or inferiority of our machine. But software for both machines will be very different, and it would be a mistake to consider them in direct competition."

Yamauchi-san also commented on the difficulties of marketing the 'Cube outside Japan. "Sales of GameCube software fell short in North America and Europe last year, and I believe that's due to the popularity of violent games on other consoles," he said. "Our target market is the entire world, so it's very difficult to develop software that appeals to everyone. That's why it's hard to achieve success in America and Europe for Japanese developers, even the most talented ones." While we don't agree with all Yamauchi-san's comments (the likes of Miyamoto-san and Hideo Kojima are hardly unknown) his frankness is refreshing.

OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE OLD

LIK SANG AND OLDERGAMES TO RELEASE NEW RETRO TITLES

Lik-Sang.com, the online import specialist, has joined forces with OlderGames to publish a series of new titles for once forgotten consoles. After acquiring the popular *SuperFighter* licence, OlderGames decided that it needed a like-minded distributor to help market upcoming titles based on the licence. Lik Sang will now concentrate on giving new titles the profile and marketing they deserve, while OlderGames concentrates on developing new games for numerous systems.

"Lik Sang stepping in means not to have worries any more about communication and distribution," said R.W. Bivins, CEO and creative director of OlderGames. "This will put less strain on our company which would rather focus its efforts on development and publishing aspects of the game."

Lik-Sang.com's marketing manager, Pascal Clarysse, has high hopes for the partnership. "With our Otaku corner we showed our intentions to increase support towards all gaming communities playing on every game platform, no matter of the release date of it. Let the past consoles catch up and have a future in the videogames industry."

We can't wait to see how the numerous versions of *SuperFighter* (including Mega CD, Philips CD-I and Neo-Geo CD iterations) turn out.



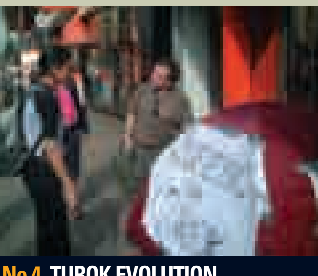
Bring your MegaCD or CD-I back to life with new games.

games™ THE TOP FIVE

ACCLAIM'S ODDEST PUBLICITY STUNTS

No.5 BURNOUT 2

At least paying people's parking fines is nice.



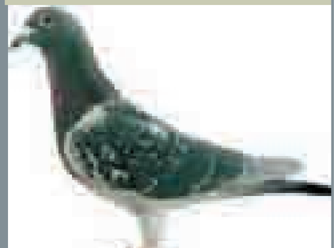
No.4 TUROK EVOLUTION

This bloke must have heard of pre-ordering. Surely…



No.3 SHADOW MAN 2

Adverts on gravestones? Hmm, tasteful…



No.2 VIRTUA TENNIS 2

Isn't spray-painting pigeons against the law?



No.1 TUROK EVOLUTION

"Actually, my name's Turok, and so's my wife's…" Losers.

DEATH BY GAMING

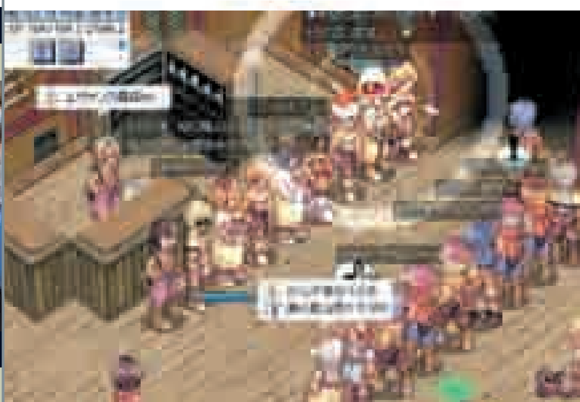
THAI GOVERNMENT IMPOSES STRICT BAN ON ONLINE GAMES

After a spate of deaths in South East Asia, Thai officials will be implementing a strict curfew on online gaming. Last year alone, two Asian men collapsed and died from exhaustion after marathon game binges – one of the men clocked up an unbelievable 86 hours of continuous play and was later found dead in an Internet café's toilet. Another man died just over a week later after playing various titles for 32 hours non-stop.

Since 15 July all online game servers have been blocked between 10pm and 6am. Internet cafes are also being included in the ban – which will continue until 30 September – although it's too early to see how this will hit them financially.

It isn't only a curfew that's being imposed – all gamers will now have to take mandatory game breaks every two hours in Internet cafés. It is thought that the main cause of online addiction is a popular Korean RPG entitled *Ragnarok*, which is attracting new fans around the world.

With online gaming being so popular in South East Asia (especially in Korea), we're pleased to see that officials are using their powers sensibly, as opposed to jumping onto the 'all games are evil' bandwagon and calling for an all-out ban.



Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HOORAY, 20 YEARS OLD

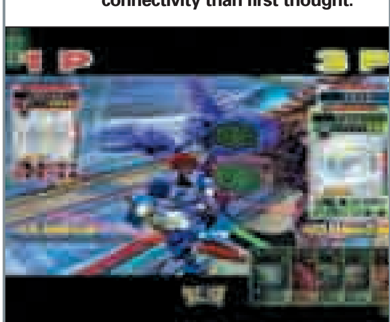
Party hats on – Nintendo's Famicom (NES) has just turned 20. To celebrate this achievement, Nintendo's president, Satoru Iwata, will give the keynote speech at this year's Tokyo Game Show (despite Nintendo not having a display there). It's thought that Iwata-san's speech will focus on the last two decades in the industry since the Famicom's release and where the industry is expected to go in the future. Nintendo of Japan is also giving away a thousand limited edition GBAs in the Famicom's colours to celebrate.

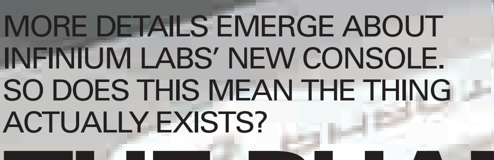




GBA GETS CONNECTED, AGAIN

SEGA has revealed that its new RPG, *Phantasy Star Online III: C.A.R.D Revolution*, will be the latest title to feature GBA to GameCube connectivity. Whilst SEGA is being very vague about how the new features will work, we're expecting to be able to download and trade cards and maybe even get to play another classic Sonic Team game like *NiGHTS*. With the likes of EA pushing titles such as *The Sims: Bustin' Out* and Nintendo's showing of *Pac-Man* at E3, it seems there could be more to connectivity than first thought.





MORE DETAILS EMERGE ABOUT INFINIUM LABS' NEW CONSOLE. SO DOES THIS MEAN THE THING ACTUALLY EXISTS?

THE PHANTOM MENACE?



Doom III and *Half-Life 2* could be selling points.

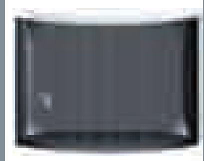
After much speculation, it's been revealed that Infinium Labs' elusive Phantom will finally put in an appearance at the first annual Ultimate Gamers Expo. "We're very excited to be unveiling the Phantom for the first time," said Tim Roberts, CEO of Infinium Labs. "This show is the perfect venue and gives us the unique opportunity to show the system first-hand to over 100,000 gamers and industry insiders."

Along with this surprise announcement, more details about the actual machine have been released. The Phantom will dispense with the usual CD drive or cartridge slot and instead appears to be little more than a Windows XP PC without a monitor. Games for the machine will be downloaded from the Internet directly from Infinium via a secure channel (a move which, if it works, could be very beneficial for PC distributors).

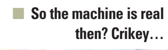
Recent rumours are also suggesting that the new machine will be fully capable of running the hotly anticipated *Doom III* and *Half-Life 2*; this in itself could prove to be a major selling point, especially if the console stays close to the rumoured $400 (£250) retail price.

With around $25 million (£15.5 million) of venture capital being spent on the machine it's safe to say that we're growing more interested in this project. An important point to remember though, is that as exciting as the new technology may sound, the machine itself will be on some rather middling ground. On the one side will be console users who won't appreciate the standard problems that come with PCs, on the other will be consumers who already own a PC and don't need another one that can only play games.

Regardless, there are interesting times ahead for Infinium's new console and the show on 15 August should reveal more details.

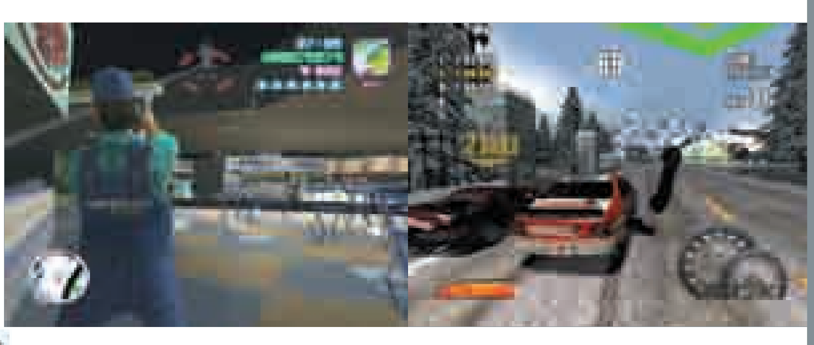


So the machine is real then? Crikey…









RENDERWARE 2?

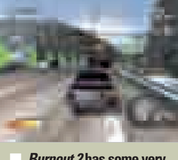
CRITERION ACQUIRES NEW PHYSICS IP

Criterion Software has recently completed the acquisition of MathEngine's physics intellectual property. Criterion – whose RenderWare program has been used on games such as *GTA: Vice City*, *Pro Evolution Soccer 2* and *Burnout 2* – has been in talks with MathEngine since early last year.

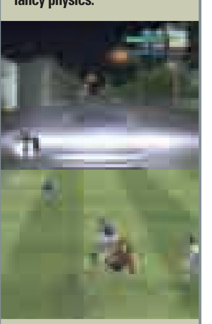
"We plan to do for physics middleware what we did for graphics," said Adam Billyard, chief technical officer at Criterion Software. "Provide an affordable, highly optimised, multi-platform solution that developers can leverage to push the creative envelope. There are also some really exciting technical directions we plan to take, that are just not possible with a standalone physics technology."

"Our goal is to ensure that RenderWare technology supports every part of the game development process," said David Lau-Kee, president and CEO of Criterion Software. "The acquisition of this intellectual property supports this strategy."

At **games™** we feel RenderWare can be a double-edged sword – while we praise its use in the likes of *GTA* and the *Pro Evo* soccer series, it can be a means of producing 'quick and easy' ports.



Burnout 2 has some very fancy physics.



The *Pro Evo* series also uses RenderWare.

THE SIDEWINDER SLEEPS TONIGHT

MICROSOFT QUITS THE PC ACCESSORY MARKET

Despite owning more than 50 per cent of the market, Microsoft is making a surprise exit from the PC games accessories business. Continually shrinking sales are said to be the main reason for the unexpected departure, although Microsoft has stated that it will continue to support the PC market in the form of new mice and keyboards.

"Due to double-digit market declines in the PC gaming devices categories (PC gamepads, joysticks and steering wheels) over the past three years, Microsoft has now decided to retire the Sidewinder brand and exit this category," said Stephanie Kinkade, UK hardware marketing manager for Microsoft. "Although saddened to exit this category we are excited about using the resources to develop new and exciting advancements in our existing business – mice and keyboards – and enter new, growth categories in the future."

Considering that the PC games accessories market is currently worth around £30 million in the UK, we find it strange that Microsoft is so eager to quit (after all, it still refuses to give up on Xbox in Japan). Nevertheless, this is bound to be good news for Microsoft's competitors, Saitek and Logitech. Providing customer confidence isn't lost due to Microsoft's departure, it will hopefully bring increased competition to an otherwise unexciting market.

Sidewinder RIP.



You'll have to get your joystick kicks elsewhere.



GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

NO.9: YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

It's a fact that no publisher can consistently produce quality games – a few duffers are always going to sneak through, no matter what. Naturally, it's our job (as journalists and, more importantly, gamers) to tell you which ones don't cut the mustard but not surprisingly, the publishers aren't exactly keen on this; there really is such a thing as bad press and, as such, they'd rather you not review something at all if it's getting a crap score.

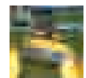
Of course, we've learnt to deal with this – you're always going to get the odd PR person who takes exception to a particularly bad score, even if the review itself justifies it. What's really starting to tick us off though are publishers who know they have a quality game on the horizon (one that'll sell by the bucketload, regardless of how much publicity it gets) and therefore use it as a bargaining chip against their lower-quality titles. It's a cheap ploy, but it works with some people – putting a quality game on the cover of a mag will obviously push your sales up, so what's the harm in giving a couple of bad games slightly higher scores? Quite a bit, as it happens; particularly if you take pride in a little thing known as integrity…

Half-Life 2 – one game that most mags would kill to get the exclusive on. But worth compromising your principles for? Nope.

Did *DOAXBV* deserve its high scores? No, but then Tecmo has some nice games on the horizon.



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

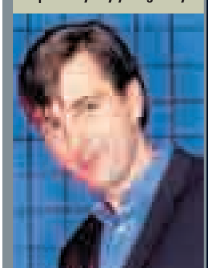


GIRLS ON TOP

With Hisao Oguchi being promoted to president of SEGA, it meant that Hitmaker Studio (creator of *Crazy Taxi* and *Confidential Mission*) needed to find a replacement president. The position at the SEGA subsidiary has now been filled by *Virtual Tennis* and *Virtual On Marz* producer Mie Kumagai, who has become SEGA's first female studio president. Considering that many more Japanese women play games as opposed to their Western counterparts, it is surprising that this is the first time that any Japanese game studio has actually had a female president (although SEGA does employ many female artists and designers). Kumagai-san joined SEGA in 1993 and received considerable praise for the *Virtua Tennis* series.



Larry Probst could probably buy your granny.



Don Mattrick isn't short of a bob or two.



HOW MUCH?

ELECTRONIC ARTS HAS RELEASED THE SALARIES FOR ITS TOP EXECUTIVES – PREPARE TO CRY…

Thanks to the Securities and Exchange Commission, the salaries of Electronic Arts' top executives have been revealed to all and sundry. Unsurprisingly, it's EA's chairman and CEO, Larry Probst, who commands the most impressive wage. In 2003 he was paid a cool $696,535 (£427,350). Not only that, he also received a $1.1 million (£715,000) bonus and options on 400,000 shares.

Don Mattrick, president of worldwide studios, saw his salary expand to $606,551 (£372,175), a bonus of $700,000 (429,475) and further options on 300,000 shares.

Last but by no means least is Warren Jenson, executive VP and CFO. While he only received $375,755 (£230,510) and a bonus of $400,000 (£247,840), he was able to buy 600,000 shares and was allowed a further $500,000 (£306,165) for accepting employment at Electronic Arts. Add a further $100,000 for relocation and housing expenses and a $4 million (nearly £2.5 million) loan – which only has to be paid back if Jenson leaves the company – and it's quite clear that many people will feel they're in the wrong jobs.

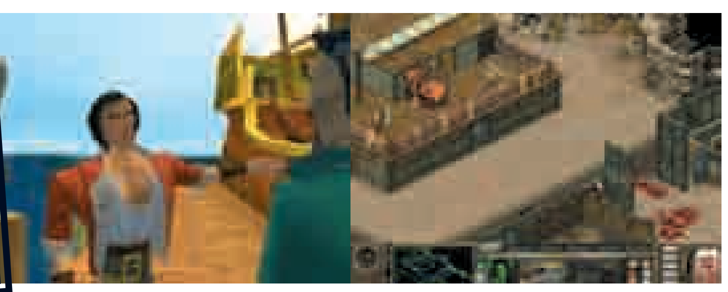


AFTER NUMEROUS PROBLEMS, VIRGIN INTERACTIVE IS NO MORE

A VIRGIN NO LONGER

Titus Interactive has finally put its distribution subsidiary, Virgin Interactive, to rest and renamed it Avalon Interactive. Although it was initially seen as a rival to EA and had the likes of Westwood and Capcom on its books, Virgin Interactive suffered a series of mishaps and eventually racked up debts of nearly £36 million.

Games like *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II*, *Barbarian*, *Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel* and Toby Gard's *Galleon* will now be published on the Avalon Interactive label and should be in shops by the end of the year (although in the case of the much-delayed *Galleon*, we'll believe that when we see it).

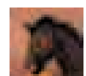






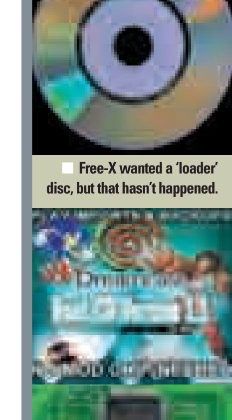


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



BYE BYE BLIZZARD

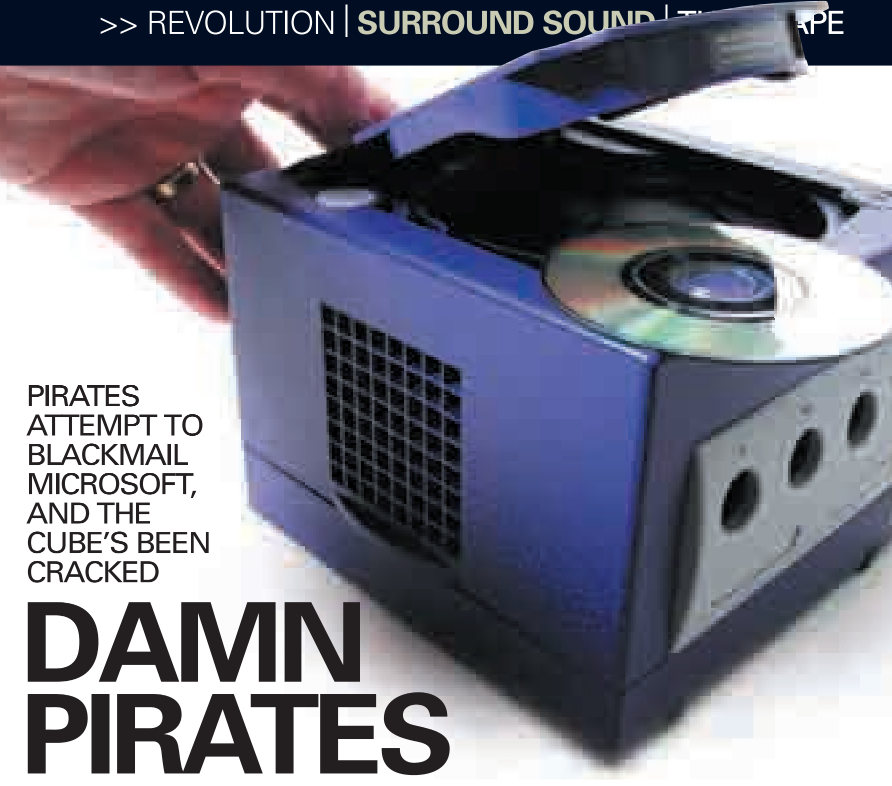
The founders of Blizzard Entertainment have left the firm and taken key staff with them. Eric Schaefer, Max Schaefer, David Brevik and Bill Roper resigned from the company stating that they wished to pursue "other opportunities". There's no official reason as to why they left (we expect to hear of the usual 'creative differences'), but it's sure to have a knock-on effect on Vivendi's share price. It's not known how this will affect the sale of Vivendi's games division, but we're intrigued to see what the boys behind *Warcraft* and *Diablo* will come up with next.



Free-X wanted a 'loader' disc, but that hasn't happened.



Are the Xbox's security measures crumbling?



PIRATES ATTEMPT TO BLACKMAIL MICROSOFT, AND THE CUBE'S BEEN CRACKED

DAMN PIRATES

Microsoft has recently come under attack from a group of Australian Xbox pirates known only as Free-X. It would seem that the group has found a new way of running pirated games and third-party applications (including Linux) on the Xbox without any modifications at all. (If you remember, we reported in issue 6 that the Xbox could be modified with a bit of soldering and a bug found in *James Bond: Agent Under Fire*.)

Free-X originally wanted Microsoft to release a signed 'loader' which would enable Linux to run on the console. However, a recent statement from Free-X claims that since Microsoft refused to get in touch with them, the group has released details of its hacking onto certain Internet mailing lists. It's rumoured that Free-X's hack exploits the security of the Xbox dashboard and allows games to be loaded via a simple boot loader (making it extremely similar to the Dreamcast's Utopia disc). It's too early to know if this sort of breakthrough would seriously harm the Xbox; however, we do know that Microsoft has taken the matter very seriously and the case is now residing with its piracy division.

"Our primary concern is to provide our users of legitimate hardware and software a rich product experience," said a spokesperson for Microsoft. "Xbox is in the business of providing a gaming platform and as such doesn't provide a warranty or other support services to those who use their Xbox for other purposes."

It's not only Microsoft that has come under attack from pirates – Nintendo's seemingly impregnable GameCube has also fallen victim. An online piracy group going under the moniker StarCube has successfully ripped the images (commonly called ISOs) from several GameCube titles and posted them onto the Internet. While some roguish individuals will no doubt be pleased by this news, it's important to remember that whilst the ISOs themselves have successfully been ripped, there is currently no way to transfer them onto GameCube discs. There are rumours that the Panasonic Q is able to play the games if they are burnt onto normal DVDs, but these currently remain unsubstantiated.

Piracy is a huge concern that threatens the whole industry and we're alarmed at how quickly hackers are able to circumvent the various protection programs built into each console. Microsoft and Nintendo are having a hard enough time as it is without having their potential user bases usurped by unscrupulous individuals looking to make a quick and easy profit.

We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £5 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. There are still a few quality games kicking around, so we're sure you'll think of something…



"WE'RE TREMENDOUSLY EXCITED ABOUT BRINGING THE ADVENTURE GENRE TO A WIDER AUDIENCE USING CONTEMPORARY GAMEPLAY THAT MODERN CONSOLE AND PC OWNERS ARE FAMILIAR WITH"

CHARLES CECIL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

CHARLES CECIL

REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

When it comes to traditional adventure games, there's been much talk lately regarding the genre's demise. However, the reality has proven to be entirely different – recent years have seen surprise hits such as *The Longest Journey* and *Syberia*, while a glance at the release lists shows promising titles such as *Runaway*, *Full Throttle: Hell On Wheels*, *Sam & Max 2* and a *Syberia* sequel all on the horizon. If it's evolution you're after though, you should look no further than *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* – a game which looks set to not only continue the mythology covered in the previous two games, but take the concept of adventure gaming in a whole new direction.

"We're tremendously excited about bringing the adventure genre to a wider audience using contemporary gameplay that modern console and PC owners are familiar with," says Charles Cecil, managing director of Revolution Software. Of course, when it comes to adventure games, Cecil knows what he's talking about. His career in the games industry started in 1982 while he was at university, writing text adventures for the ZX81 for Artic Computing. Their commercial success prompted Cecil to take up a permanent role writing videogames which, according to the man himself, was "a much more interesting career than engineering".

After a stint at Activision, Charles decided to go back to his adventure game roots, and with the help of fellow industry veterans Noirin Carmody, Tony Warriner and David Sykes, Revolution Software was born. The first games developed under the new company were *Lure Of The Temptress* for the Amiga and *Beneath A Steel Sky* for the Amiga and PC, the latter of which was a particularly ambitious project. For its time, its futuristic style plus the inclusion of a comic book with the game was highly original and meant using the artistic talents of Dave Gibbon, who had previously worked on graphic novels including *Watchmen* and *Batman Vs Predator*.

"We worked closely with Dave on all aspects of the design – in particular he designed the characters and drew the backgrounds," says Cecil. "I was very pleased with the outcome." The best was yet to come, however, thanks to the release of *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars*. A tale steeped in mythology, murder and intrigue, the original *Broken Sword* managed to capture the public's imagination – over a million copies have been shifted so far and it's still selling (thanks to the recent GBA port). According to Cecil, the inspiration for the epic storyline came mainly from an interest in history and a love of Paris.

"Noirin and I were discussing new game ideas over dinner with Sean Brennan, who was deputy managing director at Virgin Interactive," he explains. "He had just read *Foucault's Pendulum*, which is about a Knights Templar conspiracy, and I had an interest in medieval history. I was about to visit Paris, a city that I love, and decided to visit some of the mysterious tombs and catacombs; the subject matter seemed perfect for an adventure game."

Not surprisingly, *Broken Sword 2: The Smoking Mirror* achieved similar commercial success in 1997. However, it was only after a six-year gap that Revolution felt ready to think about releasing a third game. "After *Broken Sword 2*, we felt we'd taken the genre as far as it could realistically go within the constraints of previous technology. We were always keen to move to 3D though, and knew that when we did, the fundamental gameplay would have to change. People have tried point 'n' click in 3D before and it hasn't really worked – the graphics moved on while the games remained the same. Our new direct control interface has allowed us to introduce a much more diverse range of puzzles, from the traditional adventure investigation to more typical action-orientated challenges such as infiltrating a certain building or defeating a particular enemy."

Of course, this talk of action elements and direct character control has raised concerns from fans that moving away from such a tried-and-tested formula will result in a loss of focus for the series. Unsurprisingly, this isn't a concern for Cecil. "It's important to emphasise that *Sleeping Dragon* will not be an action game or even an action adventure," he insists. "This isn't *Tomb Raider*, *Metal Gear Solid* or *Curse Of Monkey Island*. It's a totally new mix of adventure, action and stealth – we hope that people will embrace this as an original gaming experience rather than pigeonholing it into a specific genre."

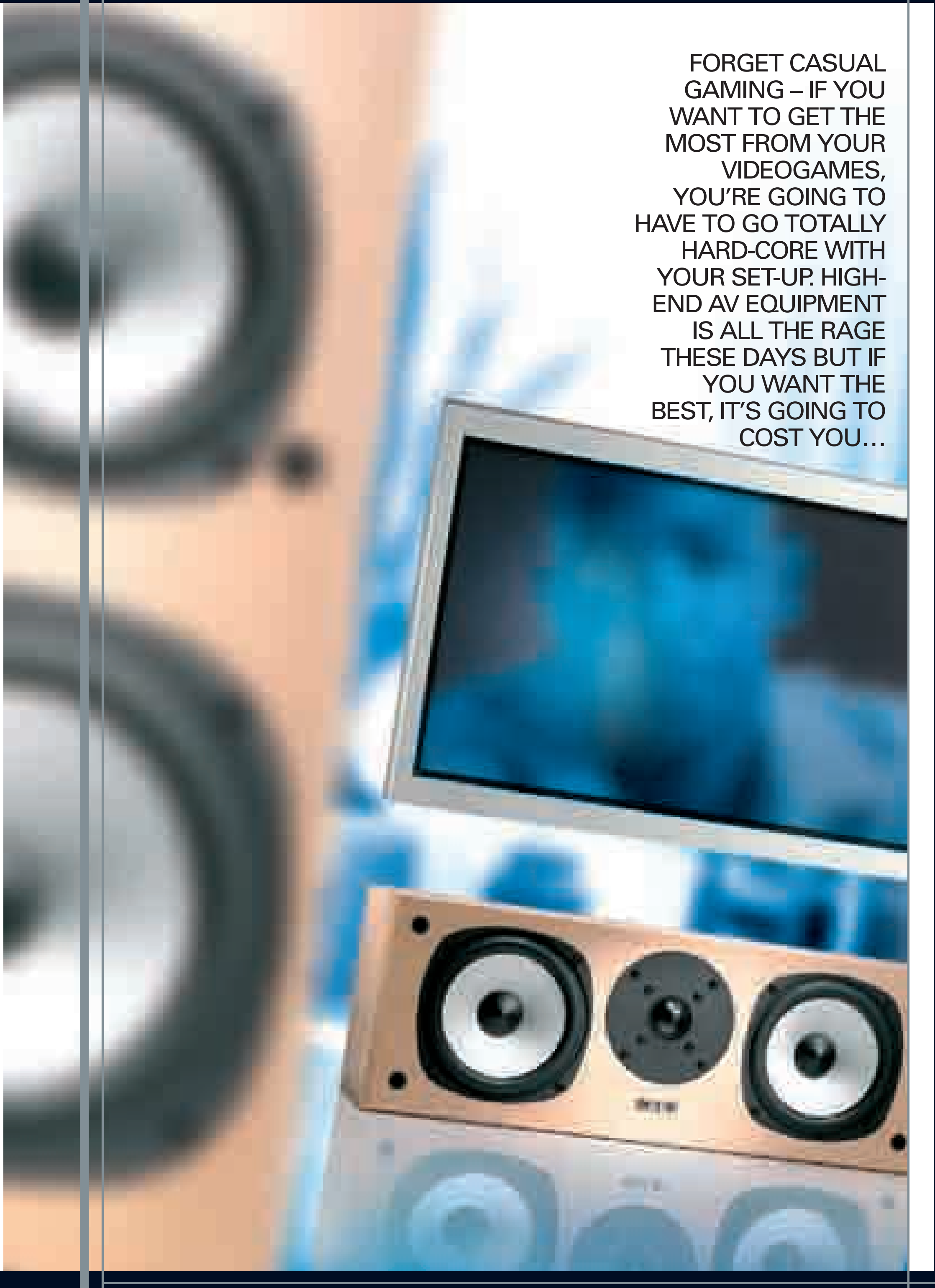
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon is due out on PlayStation2, Xbox and PC in October, and is previewed on page 74.



BROKEN SWORDS, SMOKING MIRRORS AND SLEEPING DRAGONS – ALL PAR FOR THE COURSE IF YOU'RE THE MAN BEHIND ONE OF THE MOST RESPECTED ADVENTURE GAMES OF RECENT TIMES. THROW IN THE THIRD DIMENSION THOUGH, AND YOU'VE GOT A DIFFERENT CHALLENGE ALTOGETHER…

WIRED FOR SOUND

FORGET CASUAL GAMING – IF YOU WANT TO GET THE MOST FROM YOUR VIDEOGAMES, YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO GO TOTALLY HARD-CORE WITH YOUR SET-UP. HIGH-END AV EQUIPMENT IS ALL THE RAGE THESE DAYS BUT IF YOU WANT THE BEST, IT'S GOING TO COST YOU…



Like games, do you? Of course you do – you wouldn't be reading this if you didn't. You're also probably the kind of person that likes to get the most out of the games that they play. Naturally, the key word here is 'immersive'; as playing videogames is essentially a form of escapism, the last thing you want is to be reminded mid-play that it's 'just a game'.

If it's a totally immersive experience that you're after though, you're going to want to invest in some serious audio-visual (AV) equipment – in particular, a sound system that'll help envelop you in the world of whichever game you're playing. Most genres these days (from FPS and RPG to action adventure, platform and even beat-'em-ups) offer top-notch sound effects and soundtracks that prove to be just as important as how the game looks, and in order to experience these as the developers intended, you'll need the right equipment. These days, that starts with your basic surround speaker system. However, even seemingly easy-to-understand purchases like speakers have such a range of quality that it can be difficult to know where to start.

Unfortunately, the problem when talking about high-end equipment such as surround-sound speaker systems is that it's hard to explain exactly why each system has an advantage over another without sounding too, well, technical. Of course, the more expensive things get, the more technical you have to be – although all the talk of tweeters and bi-wiring, trebles, midbands and die-cast chassis assemblies might be a little too much for some people, it really does make all the difference to the well-trained ear when put into practice.

To give you some idea of what you should be looking for, we turned to the experts on *Essential Home Cinema* magazine and picked out four of the best speaker systems on the market today; each one representing a different price band depending on how much you might want to spend. Obviously, money isn't everything, but at the same time quality isn't always cheap. You'll need to make a judgement call on your budget, according to what you'll be using your system for.

All prices and specifications are correct at time of press. While all speaker systems are currently available, manufacturers reserve the right to discontinue any system in favour of superior model without prior notice.

■ Most speakers come in a range of finishes, so although they're the size of a horse they should blend in with your décor.

QUADRAL PHONOLOGUE AURUM

Price:	£4,875
Impedance:	8 ohms
Power:	200 watts
Woofer:	6.7" ALTIMA
Available From:	Quadral (01415 761772)

Sometimes, things just look like they're going to be the business – after all, front speakers you can comfortably lean on and surrounds that need more than a few inches on a bookshelf deserve to be something special. Unsurprisingly then, the Quadral AURUM speaker package is possibly one of the top home systems on the market today… but then for £5,000, it damn well ought to be.

Comprising various separate components, this isn't your regular off-the-shelf number. The pedigree of each piece of the puzzle speaks for itself – for example, the two AURUM 10 Phase surrounds have aluminium tweeters that can be removed if necessary (giving the user a choice between conventional or bi-polar audio distribution), while the 200-watt Base II centre channel speaker has an original air of superiority, banging out rich sound that's not so much in-your-face as it is shaking-your-innards. On top of this, a pair of AURUM 90 front speakers help draw attention away from the crisp dominance of the central speaker and offer consistently fluent sound.

The real focus point though is the Sub 10 – a piece of kit that could deafen a whale, given half a chance. While the size might give the impression of a sixth speaker, the 500-watt performance proves otherwise, rounding off what can only be described as a luxury system for the ultimate gaming set-up. If you're lucky enough to have this kind of money lying around, you'll never regret the day you ask for some Quadral AURUM speakers.

CASTLE CAV2

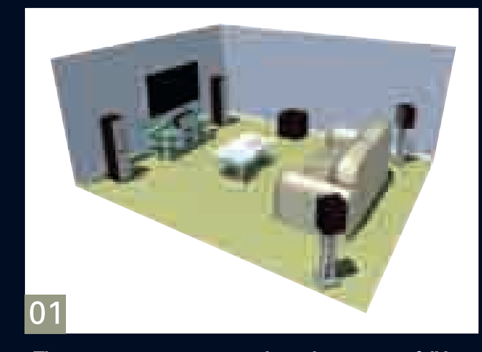
Price:	£1,999
Impedance:	8 ohms
Power:	70-150 watts
Woofer:	5.1" woven carbon fibre
Available From:	Castle (01756 795333)

While all the best consoles are made abroad, those who appreciate good quality sound can take solace in the fact that some of the world's leading authorities in speakers are located in the UK. Take Castle Acoustics, for instance – based in Skipton, the experienced manufacturer is one of only a few who appreciate the differing tastes of each individual consumer and attempts to cater for those tastes accordingly. Its unyielding philosophy of excellence (which many disregard in favour of cheap parts and labour) shows in many of the company's products – not least in the CAV2 AV system.

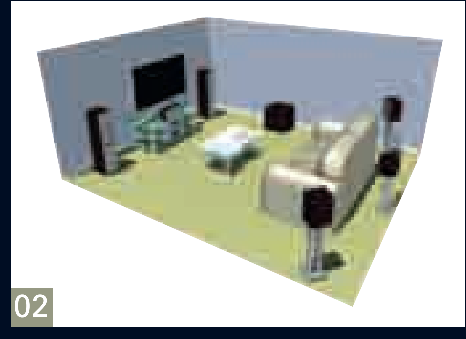
Choosing the look of your speakers is the only real concern you'll have to worry about; ranging from plain old natural oak to fancy Santos Rosewood, the variety of exteriors nicely complements the quality of the interior. The whole package consists of two large floor-standing Harlec S2 front speakers (which use revolutionary cold-pressed carbon fibre bass units, soft dome tweeters and upward-firing drivers to provide a larger sense of scale and a richer, more dynamic sound) and a fine pair of Richmond rears, with a Keep 2 centre channel speaker handling 80 per cent of the total sound information and a Castle Classic subwoofer combined with a 200-watt amplifier for good measure.

Systems such as the CAV2 only go to cement Castle's reputation as a dealer in the finer points – the speakers together not only produce outstanding audio, but perform above and beyond the call of duty for both home cinema and games performance.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT? THE MORE THE MERRIER WE RECKON…



The most common surround speaker systems fall into the 5.1 category, consisting of five main speakers – two front, two rear and a centre – along with a subwoofer to provide the powerful bass. Positioning your speakers correctly is vital to get the maximum effect, even from a basic system such as this.



Taking a step up from the regular 5.1 system, a 6.1 speaker set-up has the luxury of an additional speaker that needs to placed between the two rear satellites. This extra unit takes advantage of the rear centre channel and fills the gap between the two rears, providing an atmospheric 360-degree surround effect.



Recently, some manufacturers have started to take advantage of the 7.1 speaker set-up – although replicating that of the 6.1 system, the difference is that the additional rear speaker is split into two separate units. This allows for a wider soundfield and helps to produce broader effects placement.

TRIED AND TESTED

JAMO A410PDD

- **Price:** £650
- **Impedance:** 6 ohms
- **Power:** 50 watts
- **Woofer:** 203mm coated paper cone
- **Available From:** Jamo (01788 573100)

Of course, size (and also price) isn't everything when it comes to sound quality – although having speakers the size of a filing cabinet in your front room might impress your friends, there is something to be said for minimalism as well. Taking many a cue from the Scandinavian design philosophy of 'less is more', Jamo's A410PDD speaker system manages to offer high-quality sound without the need to put an extension on your house to store all the kit; plus the price tag is slightly more 'average joe gamer' friendly too.

The A410PDD has an elegant style that can suit any room and set-up without being too intrusive. The complete system consists of five individual satellite speakers that can be either wall-mounted or positioned on optional stands, although you can buy them separately and start with just a two- or three-channel system before working up to the full 5.1 package. Placement with these flexible speakers is simple enough and the wall mountings allow for swivel movement, to make it easier to hit your particular room's sweet spots. On top of the single speakers, the main subwoofer is strangely unique – rather than being one massive bass unit, the slimline box holds two individual smaller units that run off each other to produce a super-tight, low frequency performance without the booming that you get from more conventional designs.

While it may not be as intimidating as other systems, the A410PDD still does the job; it's impressively useful in all but the largest of rooms and well worth consideration for the less anal AV enthusiast.

■ Make your speaker choice according to your budget, your gaming needs and how much space you've got to spare.

MONITOR AUDIO B4

- **Price:** £950
- **Impedance:** 6 ohms
- **Power:** 150 watts
- **Woofer:** 6.5" Metal Matrix polymer
- **Available From:** Monitor Audio (01268 740580)

As is the case with anything (be it game development, speaker manufacture or life itself), experience pays dividends – it's the only way you can make mistakes and learn from them. As such, Monitor Audio should be trusted to know exactly what it's talking about when it comes to sound; having been a respected designer and manufacturer of loudspeakers since 1972, the company has been a consistently innovative player in the hi-fi music world and is now turning its attention to other media too.

Ranking in the sub-£1000 price point for the whole set, the B4 speaker package is one that manages to cover all the bases; although it's primarily a music-focused set-up, the system more than copes with the pressures of home cinema and game audio. This may be in part down to the unique Metal Matrix polymer used as a base for the mid/bass drivers, which helps to create a much tighter sound in comparison to the usual paper or plastic cones featured in rival loudspeakers. The lightening midband make sharp noises such as gunshots and breaking glass disarmingly real, with the unexpectedly barrel-chested subwoofer packing a mean punch through its strong and insistent bass.

With the option to switch the rear loudspeakers for some equally impressive BFX bi-polar surround speakers at no extra cost (and the choice of either black ash or beech vinyl finishes, depending on your preferred look), this is a deeply impressive speaker package with a distinctly fast and engaging sound, but bags of refinement too.

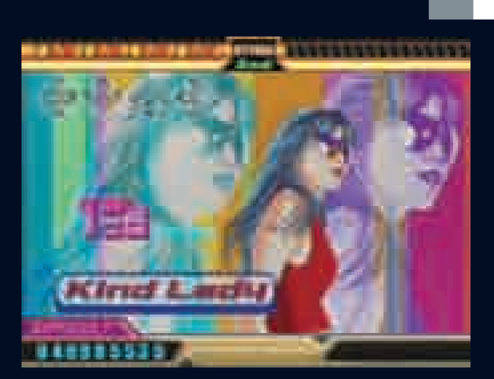
SOUND AS A POUND GREAT GAMES WITH EVEN GREATER SOUND



A nominee for this year's **games™** award for Best Audio, it won't come as much of a surprise to learn that *Burnout 2* works best through a quality sound system. The mixture of high-octane racing and pumping music really shines through when channelling it through a surround set-up.



We've said it many times before, but *Halo* is one of the Xbox's primary examples of how games should use surround sound. By using a quality system, you can completely immerse yourself in the world of Master Chief and finally experience the game just as Bungie intended you to.



With a game like *Dancing Stage MegaMix*, it goes without saying that you need to have the best sound system possible – particularly if you're trying to get anything near the same experience that you'd get from the arcade version of the game. The louder, the better in this case…

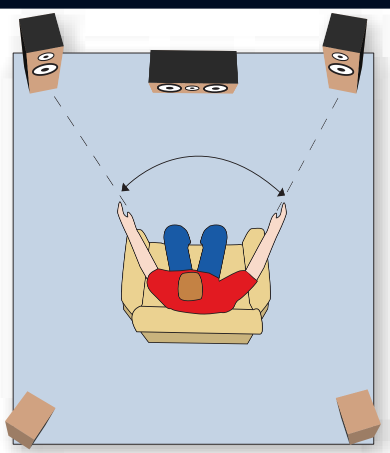
SCIENCE OF SOUND

So, you've been out and splashed all kinds of cash in order to get yourself the perfect sound system – good for you, and welcome to the club. Of course, buying all the right equipment is one thing, but setting it up to get the best performance is quite another. It sounds simple in principle (a speaker in each corner, one by the telly and maybe a sub-woofer to one side is obviously the basic premise for setting up a surround system in your living room) but as you might expect, there's a specific science to getting the perfect sound for your own unique set-up.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

When you consider that 80-85 per cent of any soundtrack (game, movie or otherwise) comes from the front three speakers, it's important to get those right first. As a general rule, keep the left and right speakers away from the walls and not too far from your screen. To ascertain the ideal positions for each one, sit in your listening position (such as the sofa) and then point your left hand at the left speaker and your right to the right speaker. If you've got it right, the angle created by your arms should be approximately 50 degrees – if not, experiment until you find what's good for you. Remember, you're aiming for optimal performance here. If the front speakers are too far apart, the stereo image will be behind you; too close and it'll be in front.

The height of your speakers is also important. Your front speakers should sit on the same horizontal plane, about the same level as your ears in the listening position. Chris Fayers, hi-fi and home cinema product expert for Focal JMlabs, recommends having your centre speaker at the same height as the fronts as well: "If you can achieve this it can pay dividends in being able to hear those front three channels with some clarity." It's not always an easy thing to achieve, as your screen is usually in the way. In this case, it is important to have the centre as close as possible to the height of your fronts. Further to this, your centre speaker should be on the same plane if you were to look down on your speakers.

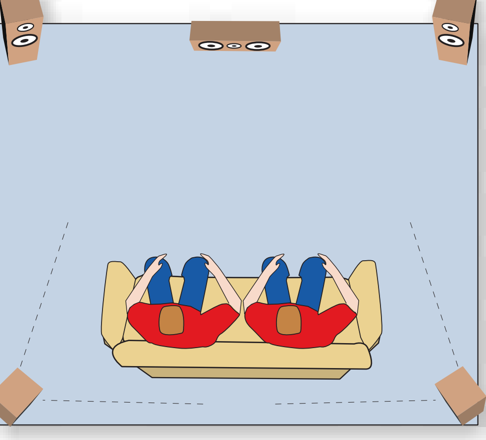


Finally, if you find your front soundfield a little too vague, try 'toeing in' to sharpen things up. This means angling the speakers so they point more directly at the listening position.

BRINGING UP THE REAR

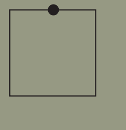
Rear speakers are a little more flexible in their positioning, and the 'ideal' position is open to debate. "If you are using standard surrounds (i.e. monopole) you'd be better off placing them well behind the listener," says Steve Harris of Castle, "possibly the same distance away as the fronts, at about the same height."

If you ask Dolby, the creators of 5.1, they'll tell you that the standard practice is to have your rear speakers alongside the listening position, pointing inwards. We've tried both with various speaker packages and agree that this is a matter of preference for the listener. For solo listening we prefer the Dolby method but if there's a few of you on the sofa, it makes more sense to have them further back and behind. Unlike the front speakers, there are benefits to placing the rears close to a wall as this can maximise surface reflections and disperse the sound quicker. Simply 'having something to kick against' will improve your speakers' performance no end, so wall-mount if at all possible.

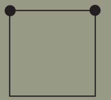


Just as toeing in can help accuracy in the front speakers, too much direction (resulting in no sense of ambience) in the rears can be combated with a little 'toeing out'.

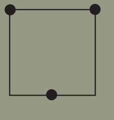
SOUND FORMATS



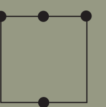
MONO
Single-channel sound recorded from one source, replayed through one speaker.



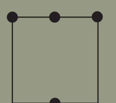
Stereo
Two-channel sound, replayed through front left and front right speakers.



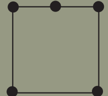
Dolby Surround
Forerunner to Pro-Logic, three channels offer a pseudo-surround sound.



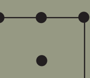
Dolby Pro-Logic
Encoded front stereo and centre channels plus a single (shared) surround channel



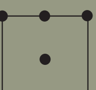
Dolby 4.0
Like Pro-Logic: three channels of audio for the front and the rears share a single channel



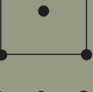
Dolby Digital 5.0
Five dedicated surround channels without a subwoofer for bass.

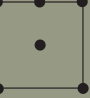


Pro-Logic II / DTS Neo:6
Digitally creates 5.1 surround from stereo or even mono sources.

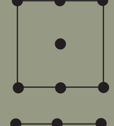


Dolby Digital 5.1
Dedicated front left, right and centre, left and right surrounds and subwoofer.

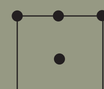




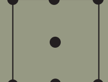
Digital Theatre System (DTS)
Dolby's DTS has less compression and is arguably superior.



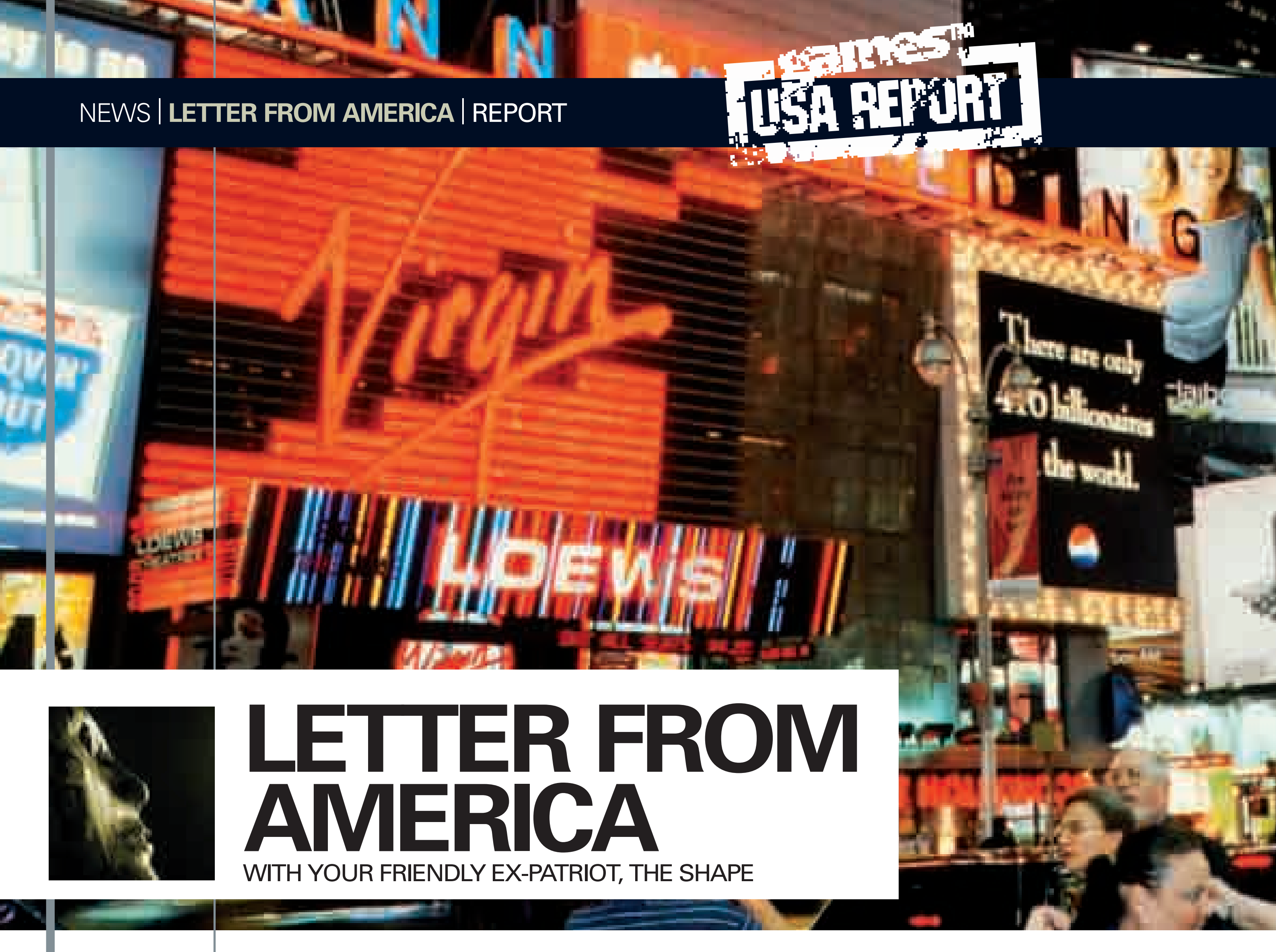
Dolby Digital EX
Not quite 6.1, but does use an additional speaker at the rear centre.



DTS-ES
Rival to Dolby Digital EX, the rear centre is created from the existing rear channels.



DTS-ES discrete
Very rare due to the storage size of the soundtrack, this is true 6.1 and it's great.



LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"YOU'D THINK A COUNTRY WITH OVER 20 MILLION PLAYSTATION2 LOOKING AT THEMSELVES, WOULD BE HIGHER ON

■ Would you trust this man to save your ailing console? Someone does…

You'd never tell that Nintendo was in dire straits here, judging by the brave face it's putting on. Roughly every 120 seconds (while watching the sort of vapid TV trash that makes you wish either the program controllers or you were dead), there's a break for commercial messages and up pops Nintendo. It likes to tell me about *Wrestlemania XIX* or *Wario World*, but most often it likes to tell me that I can still get a free copy of *Wind Waker* and a demo disc if I buy its machine. Reassured that the offer has not been withdrawn during the previous two minutes of programming, I settle snugly into another *nouvelle cuisine*-sized portion of televisual discontentment.

Not a bit of expertise in corporate finance is required to realise that, clearly, dollars are streaming into Nintendo's raucously successful GBA department – whereupon they are funnelled directly to the GameCube marketing department, which spews them back out of the company like it's eaten a bad clam. This can't be sustainable, can it? Rumours abound that even little Toad has dumped his shares, and that Nintendo HQ has been forced to switch from luxury bathroom tissue to scratchy bog roll.

Any desperation is invisible to Mr Average Gamer, of course, although the paint is beginning to crack. Two details give Nintendo away: the charts (only one GameCube title – namely *Zelda* – is in the top 20) and price (at $149 with a free game – that's just over £90 – the GC is the cheapest console of the three, with both Xbox and PS2 holding at $179). With the only discernible saviour on the horizon a *Mario Kart* game with no fewer than two exclamation marks in its title, accountants in the GBA department are unlikely to become any happier in the next chapter of Nintendo's unfolding biography.

I wouldn't dare suggest Nintendo was the only one making bad choices at the moment in the United States though, oh no. It may seem like a daft gimmick to you, but – please believe this when I tell you – I really want an EyeToy. Granted, I saw a demo of the system a couple of years back that was more revolutionary than what has finally been delivered (they gave you a bright orange bat, its motions mirrored on screen by a mace – imagine really getting to wallop someone upside the head, *Braveheart* style, or having a Lightsaber fight with no predetermined moves) but I still think it's a thrilling step forwards in terms of innovation and would like to have one on top of my TV, thank you very much.

Apparently, this won't be happening here until at least October. I note with eye-twitching ire that citizens of Europe and Australia – an isle seeded by prisoners for God's sake – have been enjoying seeing themselves wash windows and punch



OWNERS, MOST OF WHOM ENJOY THE EYETOY LAUNCH LIST THAN IT IS"

little karate men since the beginning of summer. You'd think a country with over 20 million PlayStation2 owners, most of whom enjoy looking at themselves, would be higher on Sony's launch list than it clearly is. Then again, you'd also think that, living in a country which is physically attached to Mexico, I'd be able to find one brand of tortilla chips tasting at least half as good as those I used to get from Tesco.

So what of Microsoft? How is the only American company of the big three treating its homeland? The Starbucks of software is guilty only of the same crime as it was on day one of its home console venture: having just one system-selling game with the next a long way off, which is the same story worldwide. Well, okay, that and punishing newcomers to its online gaming service by hiking up the price of new Xbox Live subscriptions by a megalomaniacal 40 per cent, while existing members renew for the original fee. Well, that's welcoming!

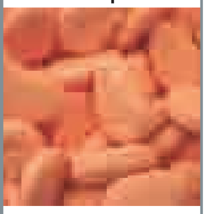
Here's an idea: why don't you shove Xbox Live, and I'll donate the $70 towards development of a second game that actually uses the clever bits inside Xbox the way *Halo* did. That's right, not a PC port, a real Xbox showcase. Please have it released sometime this year, in case I die before *Halo 2* comes out.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

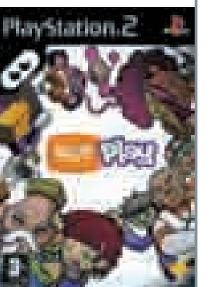
Basset Shrimps



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Seeing movies first





There's no window-washing fun in the States yet.

WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net … HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

COAST TO COAST AM

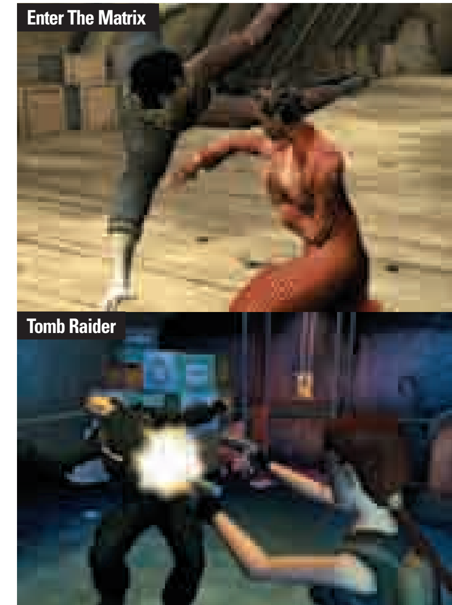
A four-hour nightly radio talkshow, beginning at 1am, dealing with conspiracies and the paranormal. Lots of crazies phone up with tales of 'shadow people' and the like.



US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Hulk	Vivendi	Multi
2	Enter The Matrix	Atari	Multi
3	Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness	Eidos	Multi
4	Midnight Club II	Rockstar	Multi
5	NBA Street Vol. 2	EA BIG	Multi
6	Brute Force	Microsoft	Xbox
7	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Multi
8	Wario World	Nintendo	GC
9	Def Jam Vendetta	EA	Multi
10	Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition	Konami	GBA

(Updated 18/07/03)



Enter The Matrix

Tomb Raider

games™ JAPAN REPORT

KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT OLLIE BARDER

"BRITISH GAMES JOURNALISTS ARE VERY SENSITIVE ABOUT THEIR THEY DON'T CARE IF THEY SUCK – THEY LISTEN TO THE GAMERS AS

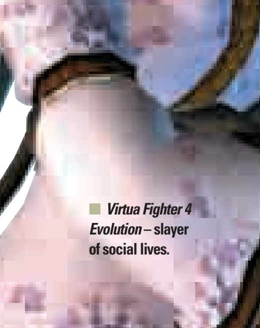
I'm sipping at some denomination of frappuccino thing in a rather poncey coffee house, and my mates are late. Very late. So I ring them and, in my most polite Japanese, ask them where the bloody hell they are, only to be unsurprised to find out that they're still in the arcade. They say they'll be on their way once they have finished "kicking this guy's ass" – lo and behold, five minutes later they're here. They look tired. I am informed that they've been playing *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* for over six hours, simply because they wanted to increase their 'dan' rating.

Now I know what you're thinking. These guys must be total geeks. Spotty, unkempt and seriously lacking in any tangible sex life. Well, you're wrong. One is a very trendy DJ and the other is an executive within a rather impressive zaibatsu (a big corporation, like Microsoft, only scarier). They both have very, *very* pretty girlfriends. They are probably also two of the most skilled gamers in Japan. They are, for want of a better word, hard-core.

They chat for a while, talking crap mostly. As of late these two have been rather self-absorbed with their *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* skills; this is hardly surprising considering how Yu Suzuki's opus has raged across arcades here like a credit-eating tsunami. Tangent goodness aside, the game really is testament to Japan's vibrant arcade scene. Regardless of my friends' somewhat narcissistic mutual diatribe, I decide to turn the conversation towards more global pastures. I explain that 'hard-core' gamers are deemed a 'dying breed' by the Western gaming press. An ominous silence follows.

"They can't play games properly," the DJ says of such journalists, looking rather hurt. "They are making allowances for their lack of skill by undermining the people that do." I play devil's advocate and try to explain that the current shift in games design is towards more inclusive titles that offer a world for the player to explore. "So?" replies the DJ. "Just because these games are more inclusive doesn't necessarily make them better. And why are these games thought of as 'replacing' other modes in design?"

"You have to admit that games are more 'showy' now, though," adds the exec. "Most people don't look at the games themselves anymore, more the visual element." The DJ replies: "I know that, but why should that make the games themselves any better?" I sit and watch as all this



Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution – slayer of social lives.

LACK OF SKILL. IN JAPAN THEIR JOB IS TO REPORT"

unfolds; I try to push it in a new direction by asking how the Western press can be educated.

"Do these journalists listen to gamers?" asks the exec. "No, not really," I reply. "They normally have an agenda of their own as far as I can see. They don't like criticism either." The DJ exclaims: "That's their problem, not the gamers. Your press are very sensitive about their lack of skill it seems. In Japan they don't care if they suck, the press listen to the gamers because their job is to report."

I smile ruefully at all this and promptly explain that I'm a games journalist. They freak. After all, I was merely their mate that was rather crap at *Virtual On Force* (relatively speaking). I assuage their fears through the acquisition of cheesecake and the admission that I'm not here to misrepresent them; if anything, quite the opposite. I explain that I needed their honest take on the matter, and not a loaded 'fist in the face of the gaming press'. They nod and ask for more cheesecake. As we get up to leave, the exec says he'll pay the bill. A bribe, or common Japanese courtesy? He whispers over my shoulder: "kick their ass, and I want a copy of the magazine that our conversation is published in." A bribe then…

Kind regards



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

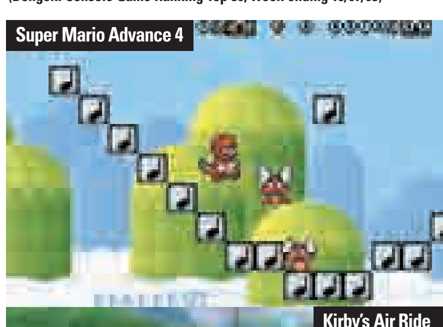
LESSON NINE: BUYING A COFFEE

Can I have a frappuccino please?	Furapechiino hitotsu kudasai?
Oh, would you like one too?	Kimimo hitotsu hoshiikai?
Do you have a boyfriend?	Boifurendo iruno?
Well, I like my women how I like my coffee…	Mmmm, boku, bokuno kohi mitainal onnanokogasukinandayone…
… in a plastic cup.	… purasuchikkuno kappuni haittayouna

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Super Mario Advance 4	Nintendo	GBA
2	Kirby's Air Ride	Nintendo	GC
3	Mother 1 + 2	Nintendo	GBA
4	Silent Hill 3	Konami	PS2
5	Animal Forest e+	Nintendo	GC
6	Initial D: Special Stage	SEGA	PS2
7	Slotter Up Core: Giant's Star	Dorat	PS2
8	Hanjuku Eiyuu Vs 3D	Square Enix	PS2
9	Let's Make A Pro Soccer Club 3	SEGA	PS2
10	Viewtiful Joe	Nintendo	GC

(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 50, week ending 19/07/03)


Super Mario Advance 4


Kirby's Air Ride


Mother 1 + 2

Virtua Fighter – it's evolving. Are you?

EVOLVE, DAMN YOU!

The latest admission to the epic *Virtua Fighter* canon, *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution*, is a truly impressive game. Hear not what others have said – they be the ignorant type. Not only is it disgustingly deep, but with the addition of a sagely implemented card system (from the original *Virtua Fighter 4*) it's inclusive too.

To explain, the card system allows players to seek out opponents as they wish – whether they be of a higher or lower standard, you can tailor your versus experience. So instead of inadvertently going up against an ex-champion, you can challenge equally skilled opponents and learn at your own speed.

Moreover, to increase your rank (or 'dan'), you have to find players of a similar rating to you – and then beat them. The later is a dynamic system too – lose too many matches and you go down a grade. It may sound crazy, but this card system has really helped to make the *Virtua Fighter* scene truly vibrant here. In short, it's bloody great stuff.

"WE HAVE WORKED HARD AT NINTENDO TO MAKE SURE THAT WE ARE DELIVERING AS MUCH FUN AS POSSIBLE TO THE PLAYER"

SATORU IWATA, NINTENDO JAPAN INC.

SATORU IWATA

NINTENDO JAPAN

Nintendo is the perennial survivor in this ever turbulent industry, having successfully developed more games platforms than any other company. That said, things haven't exactly gone Nintendo's way in recent times, with cashed-up competitors eating into the big N's market share, and publishers and developers being lured away by better royalty deals. With this in mind, a change in direction was needed and it has happened faster than many would have anticipated. Suddenly there is a clutch of great looking games in the works, the GameCube's market share is growing and the Nintendo behemoth seems to be coming back to life in a big way.

Such significant changes can be largely attributed to the reinvigorated leadership of the company under new president Satoru Iwata. Iwata-san has only been working at Nintendo for just over three years, but was a key development head at HAL, a company with a close relationship with Nintendo. Iwata-san also has a lot of experience of developing games, with his first project being *Mario Golf* for the venerable NES, so he intuitively understands the way the company works.

At E3, Nintendo's young and ever enthusiastic new president was in the sort of mood you'd expect of someone who is heading a company which is all about fun. However, he does acknowledge that some changes were necessary as he recognises that it is essential these days to rely on a diverse stable of titles rather just pin all of your hopes on the famous plumber. "Compared with the previous state of the gaming industry you must not rely on single titles to move a games system," Iwata-san says. "This worked with *Mario* on the N64, but that is more difficult to do as the market gets more sophisticated. We wanted to have a diverse selection of titles to hit a broader audience. We have received very positive feedback on this."

Indeed the reception the Nintendo line-up received at E3 was all positive as visitors began to realise that there is a much wider line-up of games in the pipeline. In this regard Iwata-san has brought Nintendo into line with Sony and Microsoft's publishing philosophies. But Iwata-san doesn't merely follow trends. In fact, when it comes to some issues he would rather take a totally different approach. Talk of following the other consoles online is met with a quick response: "We don't think the online business model is viable yet for mass-market gaming," says Iwata-san. "We know it will happen, but it is not likely too soon and so we don't want to waste our resources developing games for this small segment of the market."

Iwata-san thinks that the pay-to-play model for online access is inherently flawed and adds that: "having kids of my own I understand why people want to play online games, but I am also less than enthusiastic about the idea of paying a monthly fee just to keep playing. I think we will look to make online play a part of our current business model, as a benefit to those who buy our games, not an additional charge." This is the model which has worked with PC games, and certainly pay-to-play options seem like they might meet resistance from consumers who have grown up with the concept that online play should be a no-cost option once you've paid your ISP for your connection. 'Double whammy' charges are seen as asking too much of the consumer, so Nintendo is unlikely to go down that road.

Iwata-san is keen to maintain control over Nintendo's future by ensuring that this sort of decision is his to make. To do this, and guarantee Nintendo is in a position to determine how it makes games and what sorts of features these games have, he feels it is critical that the company stays in the hardware business. "It is essential to have control over the development of the hardware platform your games are being designed for. That way you can maximise the skills of the games designers by making sure the hardware best suits their needs. This makes it easier to produce better games and it is the reason why we will always make consoles at Nintendo."

So the GameCube's successor is looking like a shoo-in. Iwata won't be lured into adding when, but smiling wryly he hints that: "the system won't be that far off, and I want to be president at that time too."



AT JUST 43 YEARS OLD, SATORU IWATA IS THE YOUNGEST EVER PRESIDENT OF NINTENDO JAPAN. BUT IT'S JUST THE SORT OF MOVE NINTENDO HAD TO MAKE TO SURVIVE THE HOSTILE GAMES MARKET. AND WITH NEW IDEAS AND POLICIES, IT SEEMS THAT THE COMPANY IS ALREADY REAPING THE REWARDS…



COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPMENT STUDIO. THIS MONTH, WE'VE MOSTLY BEEN IN VANCOUVER WITH THOSE NICE PEOPLE OVER AT EA CANADA.

EA Canada is also responsible for the *SSX* series, of which the third part is coming soon.

EA CANADA

CANADA – HOME OF MOOSE, MOUNTED POLICE, BRYAN ADAMS AND ONE OF THE LARGEST GAMES DEVELOPERS IN THE WORLD. GAMES™ HEADS FOR VANCOUVER TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH ABOUT FAST CARS, SNOWBOARDING AND FOOTBALL…

You might not like it, but the slogan 'stick to what you're good at' is one that's served the guys at EA Canada well over the company's 12-year history. Since being bought by Electronic Arts in 1991 (and thus changing its name from Distinctive Software to the more obvious EA Canada), the Vancouver-based developer has been responsible for some of EA's most prolific franchises to date, including *Need For Speed* and the ever-rolling stone that is the *FIFA* series. With so many titles already grouped under the company's belt in so few franchises though, the idea of coming up with fresh concepts for the next batch of instalments must be pretty daunting…

"I think it's all about identifying the key areas for improvement," says Danny Isaac, line producer of *FIFA 2004*. "When we start on a new game, we come up with a list of major and minor things that we want to change just to give us some direction. For *FIFA* specifically, and indeed all the EA Sports games in some respect, it's always going to be about moving the fundamentals forward; dribbling, passing,

EA Canada is based up in the mountains of Vancouver, inside one of the largest offices we've ever seen. Sadly, there wasn't a moose or mountie in sight. Damn.

The emphasis on realism is getting even more intense, with players now benefiting from more organic animation routines.

shooting, goalkeeping and so on. There's also the problem of AI – I can't see any of this within the next ten years being as realistic or making the same decisions as a real player would, because computer AI is a very complicated system, so we'll always have areas to improve on that. Above and beyond that, we'll look into areas where we want to innovate and push the boundaries – those are a little more risky because whenever you try to invent something new, there's always a chance that you're going to fail, so we obviously have to be very careful with that."

Naturally, it's innovation that's the big issue here – after all, one of the biggest criticisms that people (**games**™ included) level at the EA Sports games is that they seldom appear to change year on year. In some respects, this is because with the games looking as realistic as they do now, it's hard to make the leaps forward that the series made when it first appeared. However, you also have to appreciate that creating a game based around a real-life activity (in this case, football) that comes complete with its own rules and regulations isn't as easy as it might seem. "The rules of the sport itself are a double-edged sword because they're very restrictive," admits Isaac. "You know there are 11 men to a side, one ball, two goals, a pitch and so on, so it's not a case of thinking you can add extra players or whatever; it might work for the gameplay but the consumers wouldn't buy it because it wouldn't be football. On the other hand, I've worked on other games where you have to start from scratch and it's a lot tougher. At least with sports, you have a base from which to start because there's already a structure to follow – it allows us to have boundaries to work within, which kind of makes things a little easier."

Bill Harrison, senior producer on *FIFA 2004*, agrees that the rules of the beautiful game can be a mixed blessing. "The things you have to focus your efforts on are different, but they're no less rich – in many regards, the freedom that we have is the same as with any other game. In fact, with different subject matter, you might not know enough of the basics to get to that next innovative point which is something we have the advantage in. I don't think the rules are limiting because I believe it'll be a long time, if ever, before we manage to capture the game of football to a point where you and I will be able to sit back and say that we're done – there will always be something to change or add to." It's a fair point, going on

"WHENEVER YOU TRY TO INVENT SOMETHING NEW, THERE'S ALWAYS A CHANCE THAT YOU'RE GOING TO FAIL"

DANNY ISAAC, EA CANADA

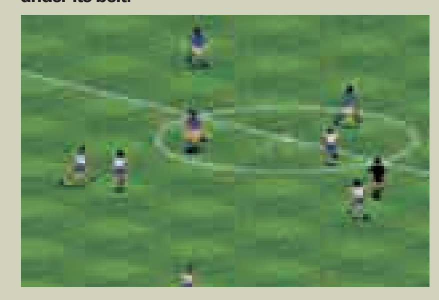


A GAME OF THREE HALVES

Being the massive development house that it is, it's no surprise to learn that EA Canada has a number of important products housed under its roof, many of which have proven to be some of the most long-standing and successful series in the company's long history…

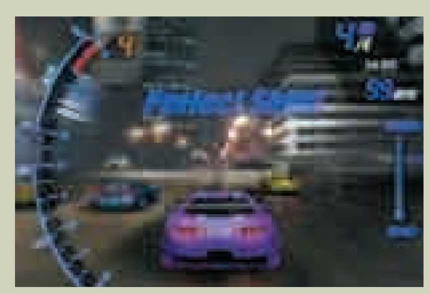
FIFA FOOTBALL [1993]

Appearing originally on the SEGA Mega Drive back in 1993, *FIFA Football* has greatly evolved throughout its ten-year history. What's more, it's become one of the biggest-selling soccer franchises of all time – thanks mostly to the huge number of sequels and cross-platform releases under its belt.



NEED FOR SPEED [1995]

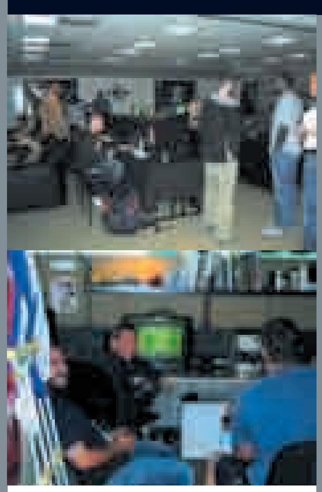
Much like *FIFA*, *Need For Speed* is another game that has come a long way since its inception in 1997 – from a bog-standard racer through several forms including a cops and robbers-style chase game, a Porsche-licensed product and, most recently, a high-speed racer that's distinctly reminiscent of *The Fast And The Furious*.



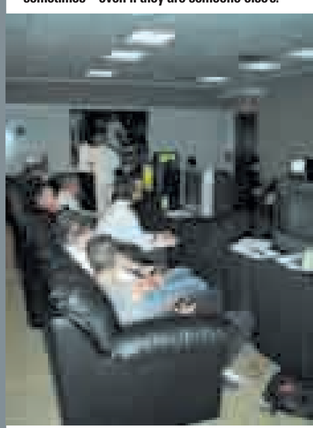
SSX [2000]

A relative newcomer to the EA stable, *SSX* has proven itself in just a short amount of time. The first game struck gold when it arrived not long after the PS2's launch, while the sequel brought the joys of snowboarding to the multiformat masses. The third game in the series, provisionally entitled *SSX3*, is previewed on page 84.





Yes, even developers have to play games sometimes – even if they are someone else's.



Gather lots of men together in a room and they'll only want to do one thing – play football.



"IF WE MADE A BAD GAME THEN THAT WOULD BE A PROBLEM, BUT IF YOU MAKE A GOOD GAME THEN YOU'LL INTEREST PEOPLE, NO MATTER WHAT"

BILL HARRISON, EA CANADA



how far *FIFA* has come since it first appeared in 1993; initially a straightforward arcade-style football game, the series has been transformed into something much more realistic thanks to modifications in both the graphics and gameplay.

However, these alterations haven't always been well received simply because people naturally fear change – they know what they like and that's all they want. With the recent moves into the 'simulation' side of things though, it could be possible that *FIFA* will turn away many of the fans that like it for its more arcade stylings. "I don't think we have to be worried about 'disinteresting' people," says Harrison. "If we made a bad game, then that would be a problem but if you make a good game, then you'll interest people, no matter what. We don't get hung up on things like that and we don't like to categorise ourselves either. I wouldn't necessarily call *FIFA* an arcade game, nor would I call it a simulation game – I think that it is a football game and that's the most important thing."

This may be the case, but the debate of 'arcade versus simulation' is one that isn't likely to go away any time soon – particularly with the release of Konami's *Pro Evolution 3* looming on the horizon. It all depends on your concept of the two terms though; while there are many ways to define them, most believe that it's all about the differences in realism, both in how the game plays and how the players look. Not surprisingly, this is getting hard to replicate as things progress. "Take a computer-generated movie like *Final Fantasy*," says Isaac. "You have some very high-quality rendered humans but the closer you get to that, the less human they actually look. They might look right almost



1 **DANNY ISAAC** – Line Producer
Supports: Brighton and Hove Albion (well, someone has to)

2 **BILL HARRISON** – Senior Producer
Supports: Wouldn't say – he likes to stay impartial…

02

Need For Speed is taking a *2Fast 2Furious* route with the latest game, *Underground*.

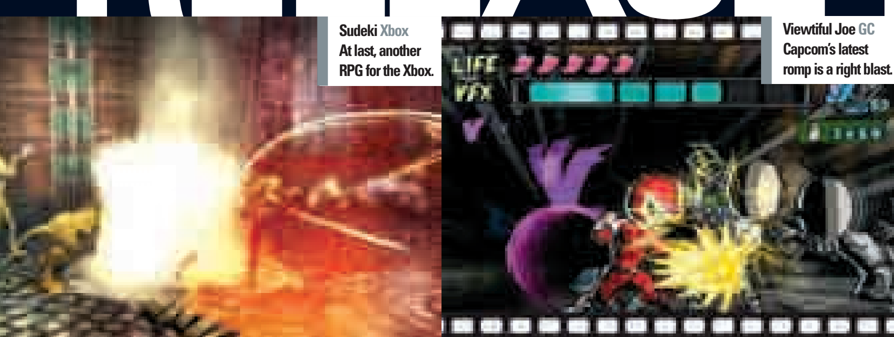
photographically but their nuances – the muscle movement, the way the eyes move when they smile and so on – are much more difficult to get right because it's all so precise. As we go forward with technology and things get closer to humans, the more you'll notice that they're not."

Of course, with a problem this big, it's going to need a pretty grand solution. But what could that be? "I think the only way to solve this is through intelligence, because there are lots of different nuances and decisions," says Isaac. "I think that's where people start getting excited, not so much about how the players are rendered but the decisions they make and the personalities that come out. Both EA and FIFA are interested about all the personalities on the pitch and working out how to get those over in the game, so this is the area that we can start marching towards in the future." The future is something that EA Canada appears to be planning for in a big way – specifically with the inclusion of online modes within all of its most recent PS2 sports titles. However, this hasn't just been done in a cursory way to take advantage of the current technology; according to the developers themselves, it's all part of a much bigger picture for things to come.

"One of the key ways that *FIFA* is going to evolve is by tapping into the community aspect of the sport," says Harrison, "because the company as a whole sees online not just as another feature or platform, but as a completely different experience. There's something about football that ties people together, which is why you get rivalries and why fans always come together to support their national team. Going online doesn't just allow you to face off against someone on the other end of a phone line – it gives you access to a huge amount of cultural diversity and a greater pool of gamers who all share the same enthusiasm for the sport as you do, as well as offering a higher level of competition and rivalry."

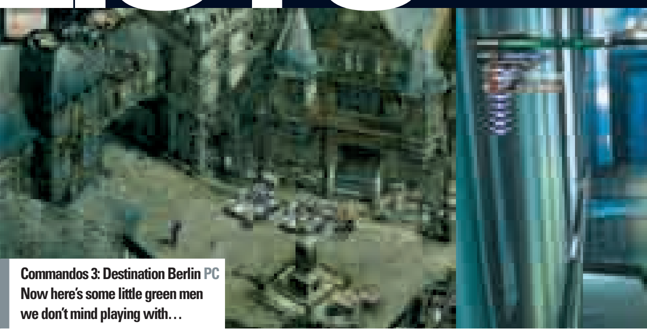
Of course, with *FIFA 2004* still in the final stages of development, it won't come as much of a shock to learn that EA Canada is already working on its next football titles – but you can't really blame it when there's such strong competition ahead. Of course, where the *FIFA* brand goes from here is another matter entirely. "I think we're only going to get stronger, because there's a big march on quality and innovation right now," predicts Isaac. "What we're finding at the moment is that even though there are other companies against whom we're competing, our biggest competitors are ourselves. As a team, we get compared against all the sports titles and even things like *Harry Potter* and *Lord Of The Rings* from various points of view like graphics, innovation and gameplay." But there are also benefits of working within such a large company, particularly when it comes to sharing knowledge. "With the sports titles, for instance, we all have to deal with the idea of physical contact between people and an object, be it a puck, ball or whatever, so we can solve problems as a group much quicker than some companies can on their own," says Isaac. "As far as *FIFA* goes though, we'll always be innovating, and I think it'll become a much bigger product as far as developing the world of football goes."

RELEASE LISTS



Sudeki Xbox
At last, another RPG for the Xbox.

Viewtiful Joe GC
Capcom's latest romp is a right blast.



Commandos 3: Destination Berlin PC
Now here's some little green men we don't mind playing with…

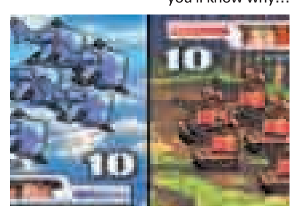


MOST PLAYED

ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING

Format: Game Boy Advance
Developer: Nintendo

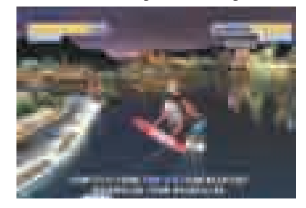
Advance Wars has always been a firm favourite in the **games™** offices, but now we've finally got our filthy mitts on Intelligent Design's superb sequel, food, drink, sleep and even deadlines are getting forgotten on a daily basis. If this issue of the mag turns up a little late, you'll know why…



WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED

Format: Xbox
Developer: Activision

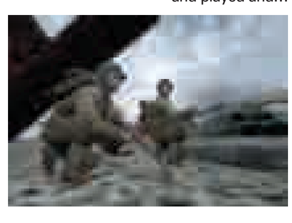
While we eagerly await the fifth instalment of the *Tony Hawk* franchise, this has fully sated our appetite for extreme spills and thrills. Microsoft's machine does a wonderful job with those stunning water effects and the hard drive puts its music storage abilities to good use.



DAY OF DEFEAT

Format: PC
Developer: Activision

There's nothing we like better than kicking off our shoes after a hard day at the office and settling down for some frantic multiplayer action courtesy of Activision's excellent FPS. Superb level design and some great team-based missions ensure that *Day Of Defeat* is going to get played and played and…



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST			
15 August	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
15 August	Indiana Jones And The Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	
22 August	XGRA	Acclaim	
22 August	Smash Cars Racing	Metro 3D	
TBC	Falcone: Into the Maelstrom	Virgin	
TBC	The Great Escape	SCi	
TBC	The X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh: Duelists Of The Roses	Konami	
SEPTEMBER			
12 September	Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	
12 September	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
19 September	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
26 September	Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	
26 September	Final Fantasy X-2	SCEE	Wanted
26 September	Freedom Fighters	EA	Wanted
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
26 September	Soul Calibur II	EA	Wanted
26 September	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	ATV Off Road Fury 2	SCEE	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Cy Girls	Konami	
TBA	Dark Chronicle	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Everybody's Golf 3	SCEE	
TBC	LMA Manager 2004	Codemasters	
TBC	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	
OCTOBER			
10 October	Urban Freestyle Soccer	Acclaim	
24 October	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	
TBC	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Head Hunter II	SEGA	
TBC	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
TBC	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Time Crisis 3	SCEE	
TBC	Worms 3D	SEGA	
TBC	Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Wanted
NOVEMBER			
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
26 November	Conan	TDK	
TBC	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
TBC	Chaos Legion	Capcom	
TBC	Full Throttle II	LucasArts	
TBC	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
TBC	LOTR: The Return of the King	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Legacy Of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Red Dead Revolver	Capcom	
TBC	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	Wanted
DECEMBER			
TBC	Bad Boys II	Empire	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted

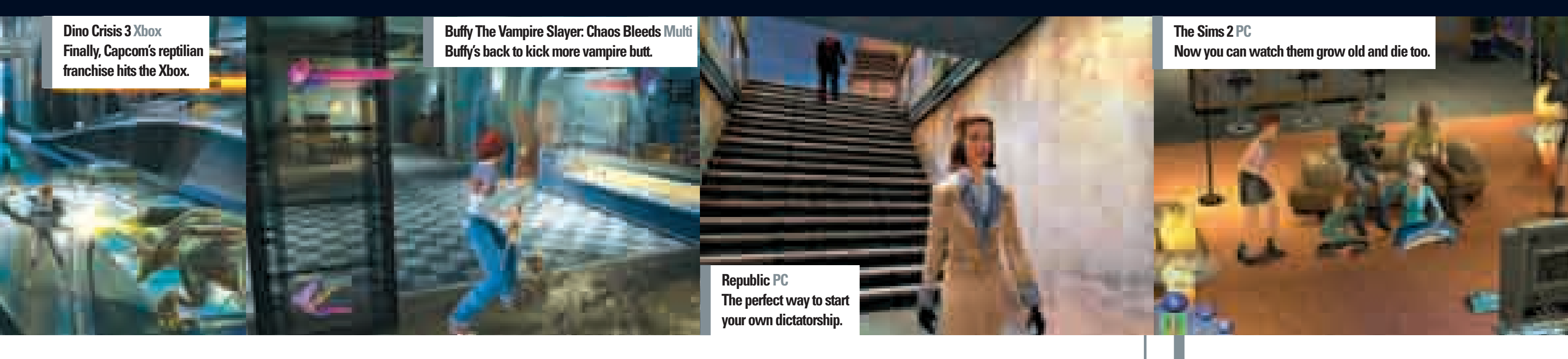
GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST			
15 August	Dead to Rights	Electronic Arts	
15 August	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
22 August	XGRA	Acclaim	
29 August	Futurama	SCi	
29 August	P.N.03	Capcom	
SEPTEMBER			
05 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
12 September	Conan	TDK	
19 September	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
26 September	Soul Calibur II	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
TBC	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
TBC	Wallace & Gromit: Project Zoo	BAM! Entertainment	
OCTOBER			
03 October	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
31 October	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	UbiSoft	Wanted
31 October	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	
TBC	Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg	SEGA	Wanted
TBC	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars Rogue Squadron III: Rebel Strike	Activision	Wanted
NOVEMBER			
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Judge Dredd Vs Judge Death	Vivendi	
TBC	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Metal Arms: Glitch In The System	Vivendi	
TBC	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	
TBC	Samurai Jack: The Amulet Of Time	BAM!	
TBC	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	Wanted
DECEMBER			
TBC	Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Square Enix	Wanted



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST			
15 August	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
15 August	Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Vivendi	
22 August	XGRA	Acclaim	
29 August	The Great Escape	SCi	Wanted

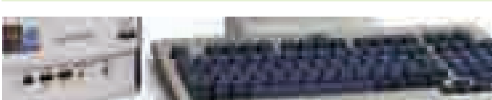

Dino Crisis 3 Xbox
Finally, Capcom's reptilian franchise hits the Xbox.

Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds Multi
Buffy's back to kick more vampire butt.

Republic PC
The perfect way to start your own dictatorship.

The Sims 2 PC
Now you can watch them grow old and die too.

29 August	Pro Beach Soccer	Koch Media	
SEPTEMBER			
05 September	The Italian Job: L.A. Heist	Eidos	
12 September	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK	
19 September	NBA 2K4	SEGA	
19 September	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubi Soft	
19 September	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Alter Echo	THQ	
TBC	Black & White	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Soul Calibur II	EA	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	LucasArts	Wanted
OCTOBER			
24 October	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
31 October	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom	
31 October	Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes	Atari	
TBC	Bulletproof Monk	Empire	
TBC	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ Wanted	
TBC	Dancing Stage Unleashed	Konami	
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	
TBC	FIFA 2004	EA	Wanted
TBC	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	EA	
TBC	Otogi: Myth Of Demons	SEGA	
TBC	X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
NOVEMBER			
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
21 November	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Colin McRae Rally 4	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	NHL 2K4	SEGA	
TBC	Starcraft Ghost	Vivendi	
TBC	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Wrath	LucasArts	
TBC	Worms 3D	SEGA	
DECEMBER			
TBC	Grabbed By The Ghoulies	Microsoft	
TBC	Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Thief III	Eidos	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST			
12 August	FirePower	GMX	
15 August	Dragon's Lair 3D	THQ	
22 August	Counter Strike: Condition Zero	Sierra	
29 August	Breed	CDV	Wanted
29 August	The Great Escape	SCi	
29 August	Tron 2.0	Ubi Soft	
TBC	Heaven And Hell	CDV	
SEPTEMBER			
12 September	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
30 September	Crusaders	Wanadoo	
TBC	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos	Wanted
TBC	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Halo	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Ryzom	Wanadoo	
OCTOBER			
01 October	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
TBC	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	
TBC	Chicago 1930	Wanadoo	
TBC	Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Wanted
NOVEMBER			
01 November	Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	Take 2	
01 November	Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy	LucasArts	
21 November	Worms 3D	SEGA	
TBC	Call Of Duty	Activision	
TBC	Doom III	Activision	Wanted
TBC	Far Cry	UbiSoft	Wanted



GBA

Month	Title	Publisher	
AUGUST			
22 August	Rock 'n' Roll Racing	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	Sim City 2000	Zoo Digital	
SEPTEMBER			
09 September	Starsky & Hutch	Empire	
19 September	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Wanted
26 September	Finding Nemo	THQ	
26 September	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
TBC	Disney's Extreme Skate Advance	Activision	
TBC	Kirby: Nightmare In Dream Land	Nintendo	
TBC	Magical Quest Starring Mickey & Minnie 2	Capcom	
OCTOBER			
10 October	Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	
31 October	Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pitfall Harry	Activision	
TBC	The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Super Mario Bros 3: Super Mario Advance 4	Nintendo	
TBC	Wings Advance	Zoo Digital	
NOVEMBER			
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
TBC	Mario & Luigi	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Pinball Ruby/Sapphire	Nintendo	Wanted

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice.

gamesTM ON THE HORIZON

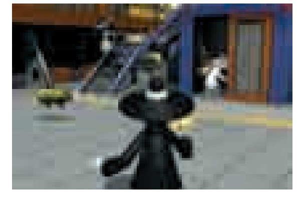
KILLER 7

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Capcom
Since becoming smitten with Capcom's wonderful *Viewtiful Joe*, we're desperately looking forward to its next cartoon extravaganza. Although it's not going to be released until sometime in 2004, *Killer 7*'s blend of stylish violence, blood-letting action and intriguing gameplay should be well worth looking forward to.



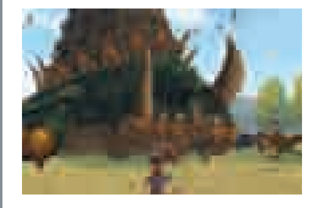
SPY VS SPY

Format: Multiformat
Publisher: TDK
Here's a blast from the past. Those of you old enough to remember the classic *Mad* magazine Spy Vs Spy comic strip and its superb 8-bit games must be champing at the bit (just like us) for the remake. Despite its new first-person viewpoint, TDK assures us that fans of the original will be very happy indeed.



TRUE FANTASY LIVE ONLINE

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft
Although *Sudeki* will be first out of the gates, Microsoft is hoping that Level 5's new online game is going to be the massive RPG cash cow the Xbox needs. It's certainly looking extremely nice so far – if there's one title that could crack the Japanese market for Microsoft, it's this.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

YOU MEAN, I DON'T HAVE TO SHOOT ANYTHING?



My first large-scale exposure to the games industry was this year at E3 in Los Angeles and I have to admit I was floored by the abundance of violently-themed games. I've always known that blasting, slashing and crashing dominated the game industry, but the sheer volume of violent product was mind-boggling.

Of course, I should make one thing clear – I love violent games. They're virtually all I play, so I don't necessarily see this as a problem, just as a phenomenon worthy of note.

For the last couple of years, I've been working on *Railroad Tycoon 3* – a decidedly non-violent strategy game. We don't kill, crush or explode anyone or anything (though we do have train fires), and suddenly I started wondering whether this was such a good idea. Obviously, violence sells, so maybe we were setting ourselves up for a fall.

After having this thought, I checked some lists of the top-selling PC games of the last few years. Based on the advertisements and demonstrations from E3, and recent news coverage about violent games, I was sure that all of the money-makers would be complete kill-fests. To my surprise and relief though, I found that this was not the case. Seven of the top 20 PC games of the last five years were completely non-violent – with the best-selling PC game predictably being *The Sims*. With all the attention videogame violence gets in the media (not to mention our own advertising), it's refreshing to see that many gamers are interested in more than demolition. Non-violent games may not get as much attention as the shooters and war games, but building, buying, and living life are still profitable and entertaining PC pastimes. Guess that's a good omen for us, then…

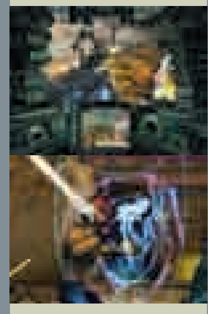
Arne Schmidt
2D/3D artist, Poptop Software

FROM THE FRONT

THE BATTLE FOR CONSOLE SUPREMACY CONTINUES – THIS MONTH IT'S THE XBOX THAT GETS SLASHED

MICROSOFT SLASHES HARDWARE PRICES AS PROBLEMS IN ASIA PERSIST

THE FIRST CUT IS THE DEEPEST



The Xbox is now struggling in Asia as well as Japan.

After an initially strong start in Asia, Microsoft is now suffering from the same problems it faced in Japan – weak sales. As a result, South Korean gamers will now be able to pick up a new console for a very reasonable 249,800 won (£125) which is a price cut of just over ten per cent. Software is also receiving similar attention with key titles like *Rallisport Challenge* and *Quantum Redshift* all retailing at 29,000 won (an unbelievable £15).

Surprisingly enough, Microsoft's new price strategy will not reach Japan – we can only speculate that the company is still holding faith in Level 5's online opus *True Fantasy Online*. However, according to recent employees, Microsoft is going to need more than a price cut and an online RPG to turn its fortunes around.

Xbox staff are still suffering from the recent restructure that saw around 34 people losing their jobs. According to accounts which have been printed in *Nikkei Keizai Shimbun*, Par Sing, Microsoft's director of business development, held a meeting for the 200-strong staff and bluntly made them aware of the redundancies. "The Xbox sales situation has become severe," he reportedly announced. "Regrettably, an early retirement program has been instituted. Please return to your desks and check your email for a letter from the personnel department. If you receive one, follow the instructions immediately."

Microsoft is continually being accused of misunderstanding the Japanese market, and this latest gesture firmly cements the fact that things are not going at all well. While many are suggesting that Microsoft should give up and concentrate elsewhere, we firmly believe it will continue to throw new ideas at the Japanese market until something sticks.

CONFIRMATION FROM ELPIDA SUGGESTS THAT THE PS3 IS WELL AND TRULY ON THE WAY

PS3 IN 2005?

There have been plenty of rumours about Sony's eagerly awaited new console, but it now seems likely that the machine could soon be with us. Despite a Sony spokesperson saying that "decisions regarding the name, specifications, pricing and launch date of our next console haven't even been finalised yet," memory chip manufacturer Elpida has confirmed that it is ready to start production on chips for the new console in early 2005.

It appears that Elpida and Toshiba (which is also making the XDR DRAM chips) will start production at the end of 2004 and will continue into 2005 at an increased rate. All this new information suggests that 2005 will definitely see the release of the new console – something that's sure to upset Nintendo and Microsoft (especially Nintendo, which has said it wants to be first to release a new machine).

If this is the case, we'd expect a Japanese launch in early 2005, followed by an American and European release towards Christmas. Better start saving those pennies…

PIE IN THE SKY

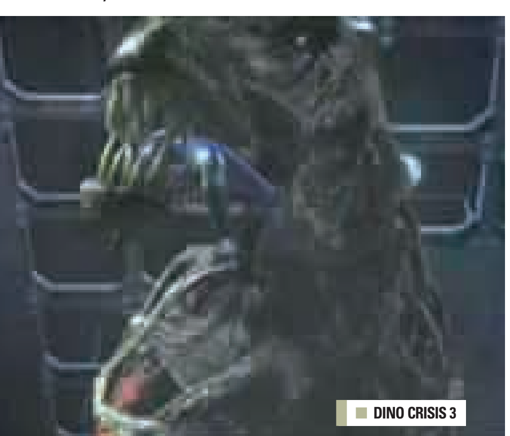
IT MAY BE SUMMER, BUT THE CONSOLES KEEP SELLING

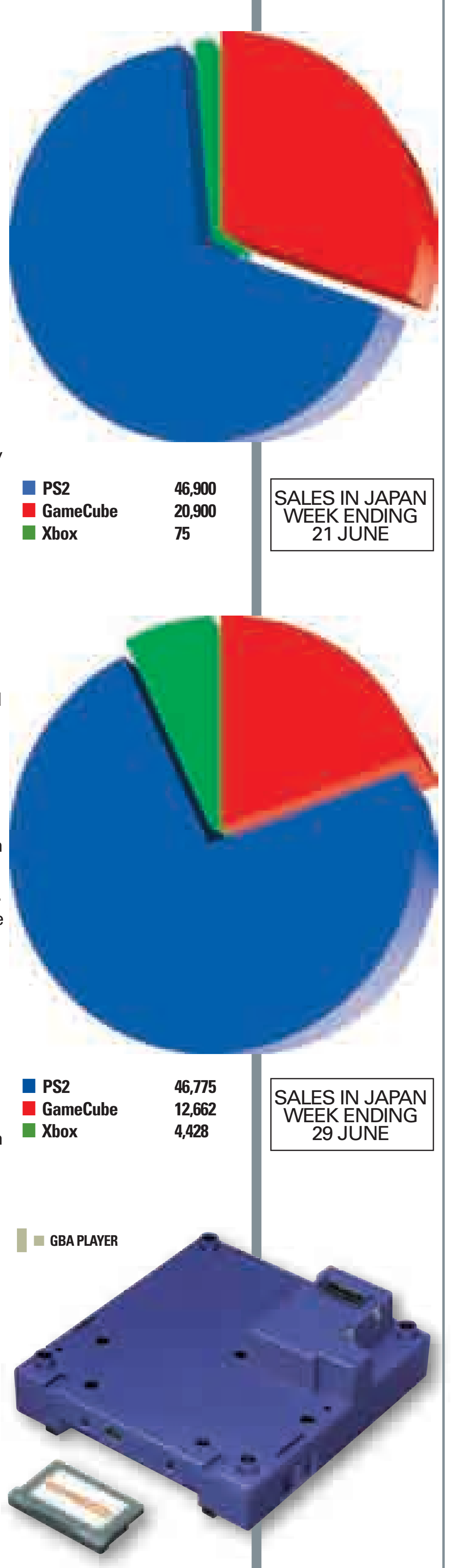
Despite the prospect of an unexciting and sluggish gaming summer, consoles are continuing to do well in Europe and Japan, with the biggest surprise being Nintendo's new Game Boy Player bundle. On 14 June the GameCube was only managing to shift around 1,500 units a week in Japan (still impressive compared to the Xbox's paltry 690). However, with the release of Nintendo's new GameCube pack (entitled the Enjoy Plus Pack) Japanese gamers bought the machine in droves and the console shifted a phenomenal 20,900 units the following week.

Even with these impressive figures, GameCube was still a good way behind Sony's unstoppable behemoth (which sold 46,900 units in the same week). Bundling free hardware and software is always a good strategy for a console and this proved particularly true when *Dino Crisis 3* was released on the Xbox – not only did it break into the top ten (where it currently still resides) it managed to help shift consoles, with the Xbox selling 4,428 units in one week.

Hardware sales are also faring well in the UK, with the new look Xbox and sleek GBA SP continuing to do well (especially with the former's recent price cut). "The latest Xbox price drop came into effect a couple of months ago, so we have had a few weeks to see the impact that this has had," explained Lisa Artemis, GAME's PR. "It is fair to say that we have seen an uplift in sales compared to before the price drop. SP sales are going well for us with the silver version selling the most, in spite of limited stocks."

Things are looking rosy for the key players, and with market analysts PricewaterhouseCoopers predicting that the industry will be worth £21.9 billion by 2007, we reckon sales will rise and rise and…


DINO CRISIS 3



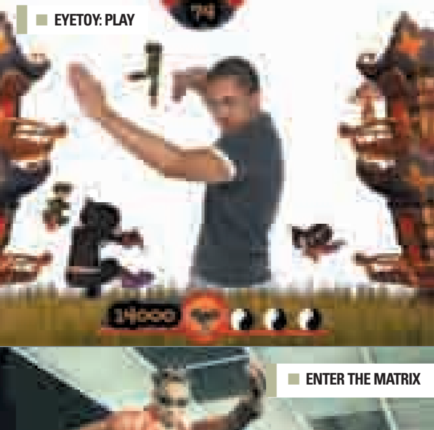
GBA PLAYER

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**Tomb Raider: AOD**	Eidos	Multi
2	**EyeToy: Play**	SCEE	PS2
3	**Enter The Matrix**	Atari	Multi
4	**SOCOM: US Navy Seals**	SCEE	PS2
5	**The Hulk**	Vivendi	Multi
6	**The Sims: Superstar**	EA Games	PC
7	**Grand Theft Auto: Vice City**	Rockstar	Multi
8	**Starsky & Hutch**	Empire	Multi
9	**The Sims**	EA Games	Multi
10	**007: Nightfire**	EA Games	Multi

■ Even though it's not much cop, Lara Croft's latest adventure has jumped straight to the top of the charts. And you wonder why they make bad games? There's your answer – that and the presence of *Enter The Matrix, The Hulk* and *Starsky & Hutch*. Tsk.


TOMB RAIDER


EYETOY: PLAY


ENTER THE MATRIX



Ever since Willy Higginbotham created a crude tennis-like game in 1958, technology has constantly driven the games industry forward in a bid to achieve total perfection. A TV screen once rich with sprites of all shapes and sizes now takes backstage to a world of complex 3D character models that attempt to push realism to the very limits. In light of this trend, characters are now normally created in one of two distinct ways – motion capture or traditional animation. While both of these methods achieve the same outcome, the creative process involved is very different…

Animation in its most basic form had to start somewhere, and while Higginbotham may have got the ball rolling (so to speak) it was engineer Steve Russell who is widely credited as using animation to create the world's first videogame. Russell started off with a simple dot that was moved via sine and cosine waves – the nondescript dot soon became a rocket ship that featured its own trajectory and velocity. By adding a second rocket and extra dots to represent missiles, Russell ended up with a creation called *Space Wars*. At first, this rudimentary animation was fine, but as games evolved (*Space War* itself eventually



Body LANGUAGE

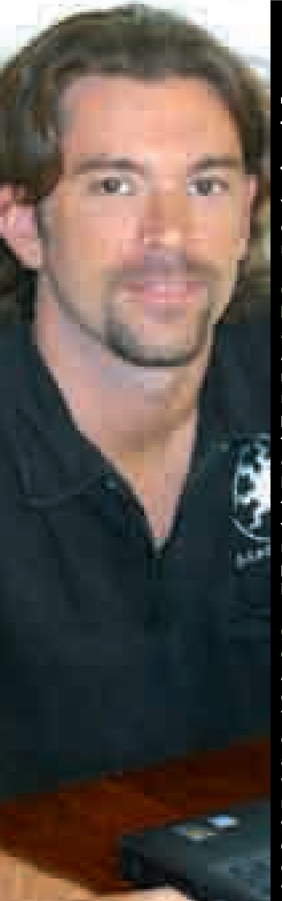
YOU MIGHT THINK THAT MOTION CAPTURE HAS SUPERSEDED 'OLD-FASHIONED' ANIMATION AS THE BEST WAY TO BRING MOVEMENT TO GAMES. BUT SOME DEVELOPERS WOULD BEG TO DIFFER…

became the first ever arcade game, *Computer Space*) and as titles became more complex, the animation had to try to keep up.

With the sheer amount of sports and fighting games currently available, realism has never been so important than it is for today's gamers. We're the proud owners of the most sophisticated consoles and, as a result, we expect to see David Beckham pull off one of his trademark free kicks, or believe that the leathery-winged dragon flying majestically in front of us is convincingly portrayed. While there were many distinct forms of animation throughout the Seventies and Eighties, it was Jordan Mechner's *Prince Of Persia* that really helped to propel lifelike animation forward. Rotoscoping in itself was nothing new (after all, Disney animators had been using it ever since they first sketched over pictures of real people for *Snow White*), however, it was the first time that it had ever been employed in a videogame – in this case, Mechner's brother became the basis for the actual Prince. Using rotoscoping in *Prince Of Persia* also highlighted an important consideration that still plagues animators today – the pursuit of realism comes at a very steep cost, and in this case it's time. The creation of Mechner's lifelike Prince was a painstaking process for the then 25-year old college graduate and as animation continued to progress, characters became even more complicated and time-consuming.

Motion capture has undoubtedly pushed animation further than anything before it and, like traditional animation, it has its own unique history. In the very early Eighties, biomechanical labs were using complex computers that could analyse human motion. Before long, these studies eventually caught the interest of computer graphics programmers, who took the collated data and altered it to fit their own needs. During the following years, numerous optical tracking systems were created

Body LANGUAGE



The Pros For Motion Capture

The Defendant: John Klepper, motion capture supervisor and animation studio manager for Starbreeze

Q – What would you say are the main benefits of motion capture over traditionally drawn animation?

A – It's a lot faster, as long as you can retain the subtleties from the point of motion capture to the raw data to the point where it reaches the engine. One of the problems that you will find in the game industry is that a lot of people don't know how to do motion capture well, or they'll buy the motion capture and it goes to another house that works on the animation. Somewhere along the line the process gets changed and the end result is not what you started with.

Q – What benefits does optical motion capture offer over its peers?

A – Optical motion capture (in my experience) simply has the highest quality. You're calibrating to within a thousandth of a millimetre, so you can retain that amazing subtlety of motion. The markers you use will affect the skeleton in such minute little ways that you can't quite get with magnetic or other forms of motion capture. Optical is also very free – you don't have to have anything attached to you, there's no tethers or suchlike. With magnetic there can be issues with electricity in the air, with mechanical suits you sometimes have bars and other restrictions, with optical capture you can basically move around freely and do what you want.

Q – Will the need for realism ever replace the need for gameplay?

A – This is one of the handy things about supervising the whole project – I'm all for taking motion capture data and adding more to it, to spice it and make it feel richer, faster, more fun to play. As long as you're spicing and not fixing, as long as you're animating to add motion and add something that's really alive versus 'oh we've got problems here and need to redo it', both will prevail.

Q – How different is it to work on a computer game, as opposed to a multi-million dollar film like *Matrix Reloaded* and *Matrix Revolutions*?

A – When you're on set it's incredibly different, but in concept it's very similar because you're basically trying to achieve the same thing. The beauty of motion capture is trying to get those subtle motions that are nearly impossible to traditionally animate (unless you're a god-like animator) – and even then, it would take an incredibly long time. The whole principal of motion capture in either games or films is that you want to get that extra thing that an animator may not be able to.

Q – Do you think motion capture can be taken any further than it already is, or has it reached its full potential?

A – Oh no, there's plenty more room for growth. One of the things that I want to be able to do is spend a lot more time on research and development, I'm always trying to push the envelope and give directors more freedom to do whatever they want to do. I want to continue to push facial, to give it that really subtle depth and really give emotion and life to characters. There's still so much that can be done – the technology just keeps getting better and better so it's a constantly evolving process.

with varying degrees of success – 'Waldo C. Graphic' happened to be one of the most successful.

WALDO WHO?

Created by Jim Henson Productions and Pacific Data Images, 'Waldo' was, in its crudest terms, a mechanical arm which allowed developers to control the mouth movements and position of a low-resolution character in real-time via an SGI dial box (see page 45). Waldo was taken one step further in 1992 when SimGraphics created a facial tracking system (that went under the imaginative title 'face Waldo'). Thanks to a series of mechanical and electro-mechanical sensors that were strategically placed around the chin, cheeks, lips and eyebrows one actor was able to manipulate the on-screen real-time character's facial expressions by simply creating his own. Such was the success of SimGraphics' new creation it was quickly put to impressive use by Nintendo; an on-screen Mario would greet audience members and respond to their questions whenever Nintendo had new product announcements or participated in trade shows.

The final motion breakthrough came a year later when Acclaim gave the world's first ever demonstration of a realistic and complex two-character animation that had been managed entirely by motion capture. Acclaim's optical motion capture system was extremely similar to previous sys-





tems, but had the important difference of being able to track a hundred points simultaneously in real-time. With time being an ever-present factor in both the production of games and films, it was little wonder that motion capture (or mocap, as it is more commonly known) began to find a very appreciative audience amongst certain developers.

A MOVING TALE

Surprisingly, this new technology and its incredible potential did not dominate the industry as was first thought (or feared in some cases). Cost was an important factor to consider, particularly in the early Nineties, and many animators were far from impressed at the prospect of being replaced by actors and high-tech computer equipment. As a result, the gaming industry now appears to fall into two broad groups – those that use various motion capture techniques to bring characters to life, and others that prefer the organic process that traditional animation can create.

Andy Curtis, studio manager of the Yorkshire-based SIMULA Project, which specialises in CGI and new media technology, has his own thoughts about the benefits of motion capture and why it is so useful in today's industry. "At its best it's all about the emotion and feeling that can be captured in the data," he explains. "It's not all about just capturing a move or two, it's about the actual character of the person you are capturing. Whilst testing the system we had a few friends do some moves for us and applied the data to all sorts of biped shapes and sizes, ugly and pretty. Of the data captured what really continued to surprise us was the fact that we could recognise the person who had acted for us just by their posture and general movement attributes, like pigeon toes, limping and so on. Because of this unique capability, motion capture can be used as an extremely effective tool, especially for computer games."

The biggest argument for motion capture is that with today's ultra-realistic settings, players want ultra-realistic characters with which to participate. Unsurprisingly, sports titles tend to be the most common genre to benefit from the extra realism that motion capture generates. Players can now actually step into the shoes of Tiger Woods, or tear along a virtual football pitch as Michael Owen and generally find themselves within a truly immersive experience. Even in the most realistic looking of games, however, motion capture may not always be used (although it will often be employed for cut-scenes). Although Konami's *Metal Gear Solid 2* and Ubi Soft's *Splinter Cell* featured very similar ideas, Konami used motion capture to display Snake and Raiden's various characteristics, while Ubi Soft used traditional animation to breathe life into Sam Fisher. Considering the amazing use of real-time shadows and environments in the latter, it may have seemed strange that Sam himself wasn't created as realistically as possible. This couldn't be further from the truth, however. "Sam Fisher was realistic in his mechanics, but if you look at the characters, the textures, the environments and even the lighting, you'll notice that there's

"UBI SOFT'S UPCOMING PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME IS ANOTHER PERFECT EXAMPLE OF ANIMATION BEING USED IN FAVOUR OF MOTION CAPTURE"

It All Starts Here…

This sequence of photos shows one of Starbreeze's motion capture actors going through a range of moves that will eventually appear in *Templar: Knights Of The Temple*. Starbreeze's actors are highly skilled in a variety of fighting styles and weapon techniques, which are all used throughout the many stages of each motion capture shoot.

Body LANGUAGE



Man In Motion

Starbreeze's *Templar: Knights Of The Temple,* is just one of many games that can benefit from the enhanced realism that motion capture can offer over traditional animation. There are several stages of motion gathering and rendering a character will go through before these final results are achieved.

a little something extra," explains Steve Dupont, *Splinter Cell*'s lead designer. "It was the same for the animation; we wanted the possibility to exaggerate reality a little for our own purpose. Motion capture would not have looked very good in *Splinter Cell*'s 'hyper-real' environments."

QUICK ON THE DRAW

Ubi Soft's upcoming *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* is another perfect example of animation being used in favour of motion capture. This in itself is rather surprising, especially when you consider that it was Mechner's original *Prince Of Persia* that pushed realism in videogames so far forward in the first place. However, as *Sands Of Time*'s head of animation, Pierre-Sébastien Pouliot, reveals, if an animator is skilled enough, motion capture doesn't need to become an issue. "Finding all the technical experts, correct equipment and a mocap studio who can handle everything we need is no piece of cake," he says. "Even if we did manage it, we wouldn't know until much later if it worked properly. By animating by hand, we knew we had the skill to pull it off. In fact, a lot of people believe we used mocap for some of our moves anyway and asked us how we where able to pull it off. I guess we made the right choice."

These varying differences of opinion clearly show that there is a divide between the two art forms – nevertheless, each animation process is only as effective as the people behind them. One of the major problems with motion capture is the way that moves can sometimes appear disjointed and separated as a character goes from one set of moves to another. Many larger publishers now use sports stars and actors to enhance their products on a regular basis and it is normally sports games that can suffer the most. Motion capture cannot always capture the sheer fluidity that many athletes possess and as a result this supposed realism can sometimes undermine all the motion capture artists' hard work. It's also not unusual to have a character's hands and feet not connect properly with their surroundings, which further detracts from the game's realism. This is normally down to poor or rushed programming however, and a major benefit that motion capture holds over standard animation is that it gives a much more accurate representation of a character's weight. This in itself helps to give the character a realism that is normally missing from other, more conventional means of animation.

IS THE PEN MIGHTIER?

Animation, on the other hand, normally manages to avoid many of the faults found in motion capture (not interacting with scenery properly being the main concern) simply because the animator has so much more control over his actual surroundings. "It's all about control," Pouliot confirms. "With key-framed animation, we have absolute control over the characters' poses at each frame – we work really hard on making animations that not only look good, but don't frustrate the player by impairing controls. The technological tools used in so many games just don't cut it. Characters seem to float from jumping to one animation to the other and trying to interpolate them together. There's only one way to go and it's to create all the animation's transitions by hand and that's a huge load. Sure, we still use all the technological tricks available but it's only to smooth things down."

With both forms coming with their own advantages and disadvantages, it's highly unlikely that one will replace the other any time soon. After all, why would players want to simply control an animated David Beckham when they could instead use the real thing? But don't even get us started on how hard it is to motion capture dragons…

"FINDING ALL THE TECHNICAL EXPERTS, CORRECT EQUIPMENT AND A MOCAP STUDIO WHO CAN HANDLE EVERYTHING WE NEED IS NO PIECE OF CAKE"



Glossary

Rotoscoping
A system which allows an artist to use captured video images as the basis for animations – essentially, it's like drawing over a set of film stills. In the days that preceded computers, animators used a stand called a Rotoscope to do this, though computers are now more commonly used.

Motion Capture
A process that captures movement data from a live source that is transmitted to a computer. This information is interpreted by 3D simulation software and then presented in real-time as a simulation of realistic motion.

Animation
A sequence of drawings (frames) that, when run in sequential order, creates a moving image.

Character Rig
A 3D computer skeleton designed and defined to move a 3D computer model of a character. Motion capture data is applied to the bones and joints of this skeleton, which then makes the 3D computer character move just like the motion-captured subject.

SGI Dials (and buttons) Box
These extend the keyboard like a hardware short cut device. The dials box provides the user with independent rotating dial controls that the user can configure to perform functions such as pan, zoom or rotate and then translate with various 3D applications. Dial movements are then instantly presented on the workstation display connection.

Key-framed Animation
Animation that is created by setting different positions of an object (such as a character's head) and creating 'key-frames' that the computer can interpolate itself between them.

Optical Motion Capture (most accurate)
Multiple actions and movements (usually those of a person) are captured simultaneously by a series of up to 240 cameras surrounding them. The captured subject has highly reflective balls attached all over their body – the movement of these balls is interpreted by a Datastation that is connected to all the cameras. This information is then converted to 3D motion data.

Magnetic Motion Capture (less accurate)
Movements are captured by sensors that a subject wears – the sensors detect where they are within a magnetic field. This information is then converted to 3D motion data.

Mechanical Motion Capture (least accurate)
Human motion is captured through a mechanical suit that the subject wears. Information gathered from the suit is converted to 3D motion data, though the suit can interfere with natural human movement.

The Pros For Animation

The defendant: Iain Haskell, lead animator on Climax Solent's *Sudeki*

Q – What are the benefits of traditional animation over motion capture?

A – With traditional animation, we as animators can control everything, making the characters move exactly how we want. Animation is a creative process which brings life to characters, motion capture by design takes away this creative process and replaces it with computer processing which I believe takes out the creative flair that brings a character to life, thus making characters maybe more lifelike but somewhat lacking in life. This is not to say that I think motion capture is all bad, I think it has its place in certain circumstances, but not when your game or film is set in a fantasy environment. I would say that, however, as I'm an animator and it's my job to bring characters to life.

Q – Is one form more time-consuming than the other?

A – Obviously, animating traditionally takes longer than motion capture but you do have to spend a lot of time processing the data that you get from motion capture. By this I mean that there will be a lot of data that is surplus to requirements and an animator will also have to go through all the anims adding life to them and clearing out all the excess data. So in a lot of cases a skilled animator with a good character rig will be able to achieve the same if not better results in not much more time than if the moves were motion captured. Motion capture is probably quicker but doesn't always give the desired results.

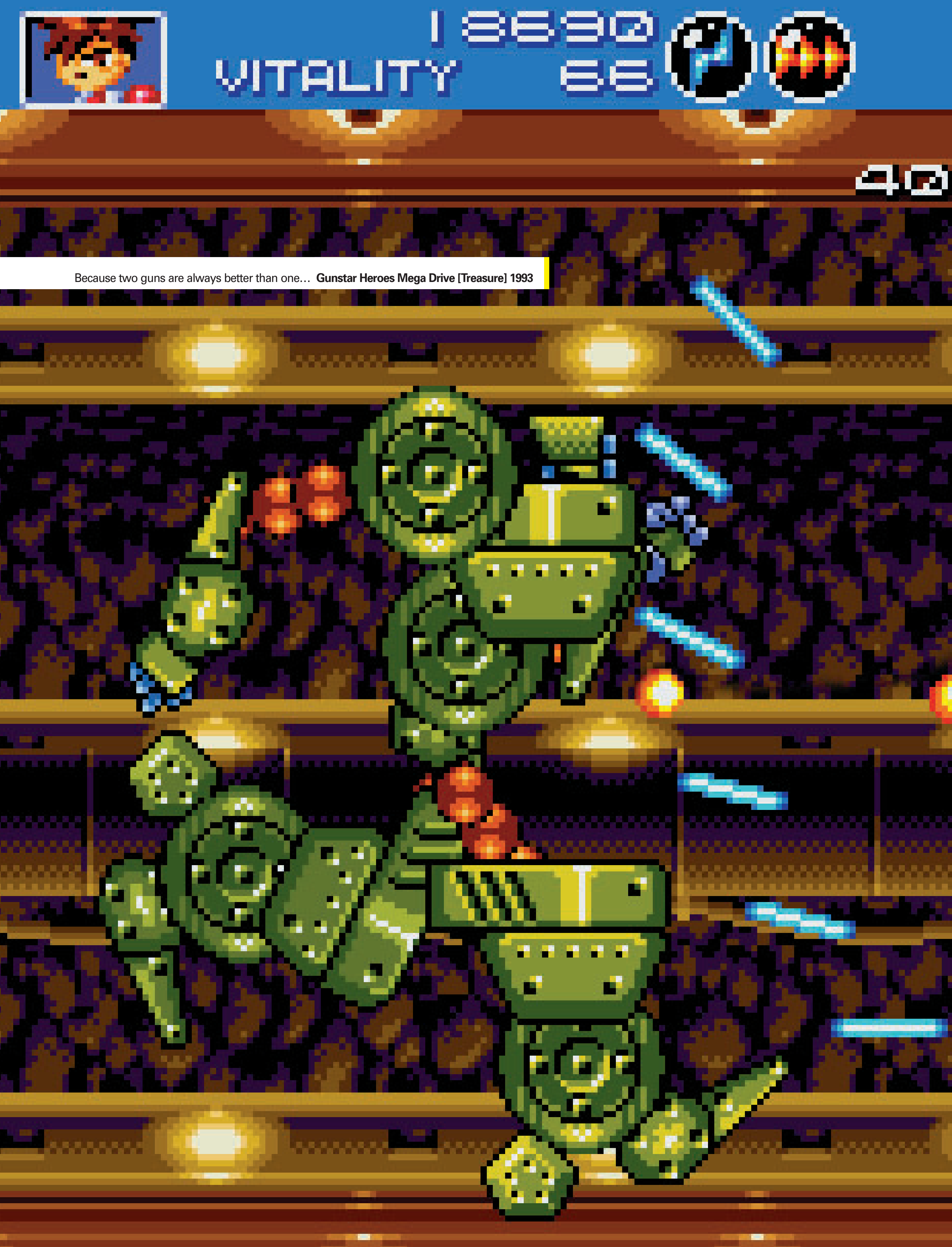
Q – With gamers wanting ever more complex visuals do you think that the need for extremely lifelike motion capture (or animation for that matter) will ever replace the need for decent gameplay?

A – I think it really depends of the style or type of game. Animation is the art of bringing life to characters in their movement and gestures and this nearly always means exaggerating real life. As viewers, if you were to watch straight-out-of-the-motion-capture-suite anims you wouldn't believe them to be realistic because of the lack of life (something that the *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* film suffered from – yes, visually it looked great but the characters lacked life and moved around like wooden dolls). This is because as humans we do the bare minimum needed to move around, yet when we see this back our eyes don't read this as true, which is where animators come in.

Q – How do you do go about your animation research?

A – As a traditionally trained animator I spend a lot of time observing people in their everyday environments – how they walk, the way people hold themselves as they talk to others, how little kids move as they run around and suchlike. Before I start an anim I will act out more or less what the anim is going to be to get a feel of how my body is moving and where the weight is and so on. This way I can begin setting out my key poses knowing that at this point the weight is going to be here or perhaps my foot here. I can then build on this research and let my imagination take over to produce some super-human moves that in reality a human couldn't do. But that's the point – creating movement that looks cool but is not achieveable in real life, it's escapism.





Because two guns are always better than one… **Gunstar Heroes Mega Drive [Treasure] 1993**


13406
VITALITY 38
61

COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN

BETTER REPLACE THAT THINKING CAP WITH A THINKING HELMET…

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Spain
PUBLISHER: Eidos
DEVELOPER: Pyro Studios
RELEASE: September '03
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

■ The popular strategy franchise continues to evolve in this, its third incarnation, adding a greater level of realism and detail and bringing multiplayer elements into the series for the first time.

Strategy games are hardly a rarity on the PC. In fact, the home computer is arguably still the best place for the thinking man to get his gaming fix. Be it due to interface, peripherals or simply a more appreciative audience, the genre excels on the PC to the point of having but two rivals – the RPG (more specifically, the online variety) and the first-person shooter. In such a cluttered and popular genre, it takes a really special game to grab strategy gamers and one example of this has been Pyro's ambitious *Commandos* series. Since the Spanish developer's first offering proved sufficiently popular to spawn expansions, sequels and copycat titles, the military-themed series has built up quite a following with PC gamers and console owners alike and is now set for an impressive return in this third operation.

Visually, the massively high-resolution backdrops and detailed characters make for some of the best-looking visuals we've seen on any format, and once you've seen the particle and weather effects in action, it's hard not to be impressed. It's not even as though the fixed viewpoint presents the same problems as in many other games and you'll find that being able to spin and scroll the camera gives you a decent feel for your surroundings and eliminates blind spots. Interiors are fully rendered and while they're slightly less impressive than their pre-rendered outdoor counterparts, they can be every bit as practical. This may all sound a little familiar to fans of the series, perhaps because it is but believe us when we say that *Commandos 3* is far from simply more of the same…

"BELIEVE US WHEN WE SAY THAT COMMANDOS 3 IS FAR FROM SIMPLY MORE OF THE SAME"

For starters, many minor changes have been made to pull the game right back down to earth. The more light-hearted and under-used elements from the earlier games, such as Natasha and Whisky the dog, make way for an altogether more realistic experience and with good effect – while lightening the mood would seem a good idea, it was hardly necessary, and from what we've seen so far the absentees are not missed. Another key change is the way in which missions are linked – rather than the usual 'move on when everything is done' level design, expect more linked objectives and logical segues tying the missions together. "The whole experience will be much more dynamic than *Commandos 2*," explains Ignacio Pérez, a designer on the project, and just by seeing the way the whole package fits together, we can see precisely what he means.

Currently, *Commandos 3* is planned solely for the PC market – a decision we can fully understand. As good as they were, the console versions of the second game felt strangely removed from the PC original – directly controlling your operatives worked relatively well but couldn't even approach the ease of a mouse/keyboard interface. This is not to rule out a conversion at a later date of course, but at this stage, console owners look set to be left out. Interestingly, Pyro has three as-yet unannounced projects in development and from initial hints, at least one of these may well find its way to one or more consoles – several involved parties expressed to us that the firm was keen to fully break into the console market.

Those who have had trouble with any of the previous games will be glad to hear that getting stuck on a mission is nowhere near as progress-impeding as it has been. "*Commandos 3* is no longer based on a

■ Conclusive proof that the sniper is among the most useful units in the right hands. Sterling work, that man…

TAKE IT INSIDE

While the main play areas consist of fixed-angle cameras and rendered backdrops, things get a whole lot more three-dimensional when you enter a building. Every interior location is fully rendered, allowing you to conduct a thorough search. You're also able to use many structures to your own strategic ends – peeking out of (or into) windows to survey an area, throwing objects and firing through them and even gaining access to upper areas to find the ultimate sniper's nest. As before, you'll also be able to make use of lesser parts of your surroundings, such as shimmying up poles and along wires or hiding out in pipes to maintain that element of surprise.



COMPANY PROFILE

Based in Madrid, Pyro Studios was founded back in 1996, releasing its first game, *Commandos*, two years later. The firm has been steadily growing in both size and profile ever since and is now a force to be reckoned with in strategy gaming.

HISTORY

- **PRAETORIANS** 2003 [PC]
- **COMMANDOS 2: MEN OF COURAGE** 1998 [Multi]
- **COMMANDOS: BEHIND ENEMY LINES** 1998 [PC]

The pyrotechnics are absolutely awesome, as if you even need an incentive to blow things to bits.

"MORE NUMEROUS AND CLOSER GOALS MAKE FOR A MUCH BETTER FEELING OF PROGRESSION FOR THE PLAYER"
IGNACIO PÉREZ, DESIGNER, PYRO STUDIOS

Sometimes stealth just won't do the trick and an all-out offensive is your only option.

Peeking through windows allows you to get an idea of what's going on inside without alerting guards to your presence.

COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN CONT.

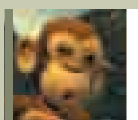


■ Making good use of an area's structures is one of the key elements in both single- and multiplayer games.

■ Getting from one end of a heavily manned (and moving) train is no easy task, even for a pro.

"THE GOAL IS NO LONGER GOING THROUGH THE WHOLE MAP OR KILLING EVERYBODY IN IT – IT CAN BE ELIMINATING A SINGLE PERSON"

IGNACIO PÉREZ, DESIGNER, PYRO STUDIOS



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Not content with having some of the world's leading titles under its belt, Eidos continues to frequent uncharted waters. Ventures like its Fresh Games subsidiary have opened the eyes of PAL gamers to some Eastern gems which may otherwise have slipped past unnoticed.

HISTORY

- **TIMESPLITTERS 2** 2002 [Multi]
- **MAD MAESTRO** 2001 [PlayStation2]
- **WARZONE 2100** 1999 [PC]

pure mission system, more based on campaigns," explains Pérez, referring to the fact that the player now has a choice of three very different campaigns from the beginning of the game. It's not just the game's structure that has been altered either – the individual missions and objectives have been tweaked to make the experience much more rewarding. "More numerous and closer goals make for a much better feeling of progression for the player," says Pérez, and while the game's maps may be slightly smaller than before, this actually allows for a tighter focus and more structured goals to be realised.

We've touched upon it briefly, but seeing as how the multiplayer aspect is a first for the series, it does rate as a fairly important area. The several multiplayer modes on offer cover all the usual game types – Deathmatch, Team Play, Capture The Flag and even Co-operative – but it's more the execution than the modes themselves that impresses. The Versus game gives each player a basic squad of commandos and a limited number of points to spend on lesser soldiers to make up numbers. It's up to you if these are pistol-wielding grunts or explosives experts, but, as with most things, a healthy mix is usually best. Another option is the FPS stalwart Capture The Flag, giving you just the basic squad and a map littered with said fabric/pole combos, which plays almost exactly as one would expect. A nice touch here is that flags are randomly generated so as well as having to hunt down the other teams and procure their contraband, you'll have to raid every nook and cranny on the map if you seek victory… or flags, in this case.

Best of all, though, is the Co-operative mode. Two to six players can team up to take control of one or more of the merry band and take on any of the single-player missions as a group. With full voice support, this is a wonderful showcase for online multiplayer strategy and instantly earns kudos for game and developer alike. Even in the early build, there was little to no noticeable lag, and with every map from the single-player game usable in not only Co-op but also every other online mode, this inclusion is obviously much more than just the bolted-on extra these modes can often feel like. Now more than ever, we applaud the decision to wait until the game, technology and audience are all ready before jumping in with such an ambitious feature.

To some, *Commandos 3* may be just another strategy game, but to those who know just how far Pyro is pushing the engine and the genre, it's a hell of a lot more. This is a point Pérez is keen to emphasise. "The spirit of the game remains the same but the way in which you play is different," he says, adding: "We have similar rules and it will seem very familiar to some although we have changed a lot, especially in terms of situations and the way they force you to play."

It's not like we've never heard this spiel before, but for once it's actually true – while first impressions may lead you to believe otherwise, just watching *Commandos 3* grow in scale and depth as you play is a wonderful sight. With the right blend of established elements and new material to keep this sequel feeling fresh, we're anxiously awaiting the finished product. Not that we'll even see it sneaking up on us, of course…

"WATCHING THE GAME GROW IN SCALE AND DEPTH AS YOU PLAY IS QUITE A SIGHT"

BE QUIET AND DRIVE

Vehicle fans will be glad to hear that *Commandos* is no longer the domain of the designated driver. This doesn't mean your agents can pop out for a beer, though, just that any of your troops can now take control of any cars, trucks or bikes you find. This makes vehicular assaults much easier to plan, though some treasures can only be operated by certain individuals – mounted guns, for instance, can't be manned by smaller troops due to the immense kickback. For the most part, though, this aspect of the game has been opened up a little and brings another layer of strategy to an already complex brainteaser.



■ Not a sight you want to see when you poke your head through a window. Truce?

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN



Once again the game will feature a memorable opening mission that looks set to eclipse the intensity of *Frontline*'s Omaha beach landing.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

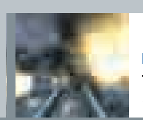
SAME TIME, DIFFERENT PLACE

MOH: FRONTLINE - GERMANS + KAMIKAZE = MOH: RISING SUN

"THE SERIES IS HUGE IN GERMANY, PARTIALLY DUE TO THE FACT WE DON'T DEFILE THE ENEMY SOLDIERS"

CHRIS CROSS, GAME DESIGN DIRECTOR, EA

Thorough research means all the environments have been painstakingly recreated.



DESIGNER PROFILE

■ The mac daddy of the *MOH: Rising Sun Design* team, Chris Cross, began his career in the games industry as a tester for Blizzard. Following a move to DreamWorks/EA he took over as lead designer for the original *Medal Of Honor* and its console successor, *MOH: Frontline.*

HISTORY

- **MOH: FRONTLINE** 2002 [PS2, Xbox, GC]
- **MEDAL OF HONOR** 1999 [PSone]
- **SMALL SOLDIERS** 1998 [PSone, PC]

WELCOME TO THE JUNGLE AS EA TAKES US BACK TO THE FRONTLINE

Anyone who's had the pleasure of spending some quality time with any of the previous *Medal Of Honor* games would agree that EA's definitive World War II series offers one of the most absorbing, atmospheric and authentic re-creations of the conflict ever to grace the gaming world. Yet whilst PC gamers have already enjoyed an expansion to the superb *MOH: Allied Assault* – and can look forward to another before the end of the year – fans of the console incarnation are waiting expectantly for the next outing to the frontline. Ever since the gripping couple of days we spent completing last year's PS2 version we've been thirsty for more of the same, and from what we've seen of forthcoming sequel *Rising Sun* that's pretty much what we're going to get.

EA is sticking firmly to the tried and tested *MOH* formula, yet aims to accentuate the strengths and eliminate some of the weaknesses of previous games. This time the action takes place in and around the Pacific theatre of war, following hero Joseph Griffin through some of the fiercest conflicts of WWII. Fans of the series won't be surprised to learn *Rising Sun* maintains the meticulous degree of authenticity at the heart of the *MOH* experience, which game design director Chris Cross admits may go largely unappreciated by the untrained eye: "We know there won't be a lot of veterans out there playing our game and most of the little details will perhaps go unnoticed by you or I unless someone actually tells us they're in there, but any military types will appreciate the huge attention to detail."

Yet despite expert consultation on everything from historical accuracy to Japanese tactical manoeuvres, the game remains sensitive about the level of violence it depicts. "We made a decision not to go with blood from the first *MOH* game", says Chris. "We had a test version that had spouting blood and blown-off body parts but it took the whole thing to a cartoony level of violence that was very *Itchy & Scratchy*. A lot of our decisions are driven by our relationship with the Congressional Medal of Honor Society and our own respect for those who were involved in the conflict, so we wanted the games to be something a little more serious that veterans could watch or play and not feel like we're stomping all over their memory."

Researchers spent time on location around the Pacific Rim to ensure the sights and sounds of the environments were captured and accurately recreated within the game. By combining this complete sensory immersion with a host of superbly orchestrated cinematic events, *Rising Sun* looks set to provide some of the most breathtaking moments of the series yet. The opening mission amidst the devastating attack on Pearl Harbour sees the first of many linear rail-shooter sequences that takes players on a spectacular yet totally pre-scripted ride around the best of the action. Conversely, in response to criticism over the linearity of the last outing, FPS sections have been designed to include a variety of routes to reach your objective.

Don't expect to see a huge leap forwards for the series when *Rising Sun* hits the shelves later this year, but an enhanced dose of the same winning formula can only be good news for *MOH* fans.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: EA
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ The definitive WWII shooter shifts the atmospheric action to the Pacific base of operations for a thrilling console sequel.

HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER

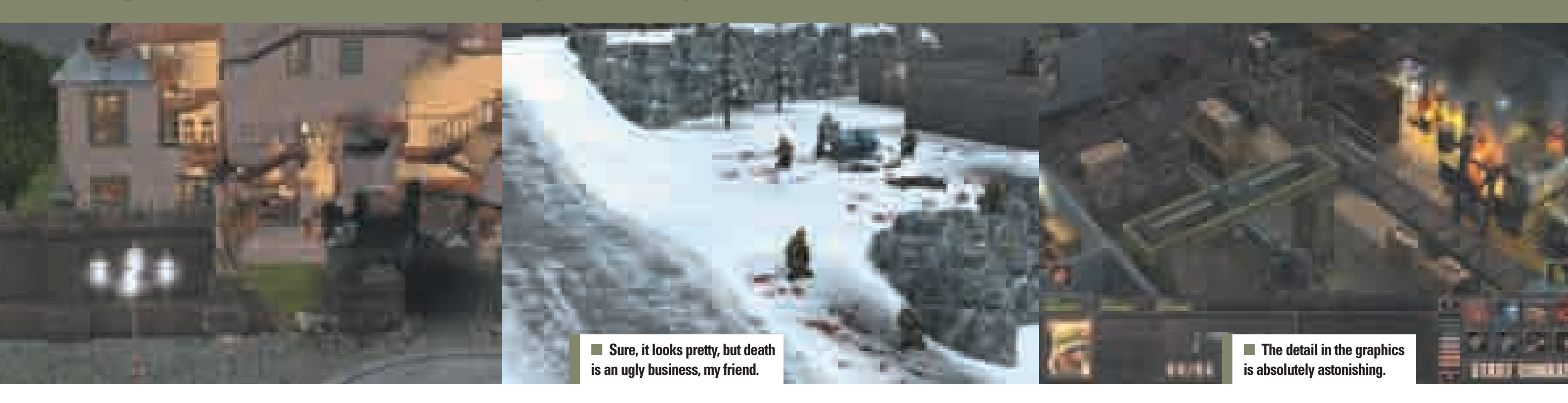
The Pearl Harbour sequence promises to be one of *Rising Sun*'s most absorbing highlights. The cinematic extravaganza looks set to capture the battle's epic scale along with the terrifying commotion of one man's efforts to escape alive. Manning a cannon on the doomed USS California you'll try to fight off the attacking Japanese fighter planes as most of the US fleet is destroyed around you. According to EA this stunning display is only the first of many sequences designed to keep the excitement level up. We just hope EA has learned from the movie that there's only so much you can achieve with special effects…

"THE MOH SERIES OFFERS ONE OF THE MOST ABSORBING, ATMOSPHERIC AND AUTHENTIC RE-CREATIONS OF THE CONFLICT"



■ One of the more interesting set pieces will see players trudging through the jungle atop a machine-gun-equipped elephant.

SILENT STORM



Sure, it looks pretty, but death is an ugly business, my friend.

The detail in the graphics is absolutely astonishing.

RAGDOLL DEATHS IN A TURN-BASED STRATEGY TITLE? WHATEVER NEXT?

After the success of World War II strategy title *Blitzkrieg*, Russian developer Nival is set to return with another tactical offering based in 1940s war-torn Europe. Leaving behind the massive-scale battlefield confrontations of *Blitzkrieg*, *Silent Storm* drops players behind enemy lines with only a small squad of elite commandos for company. Unlike the real-time tactical action we're used to seeing in derivatives of classics like *Cannon Fodder* and *Commandos*, however, *Silent Storm* instead has a more calculated turn-based interface.

We'll admit the turn-based squad tactics genre hasn't produced the most exciting batch of titles lately, but that could change if Nival's undertaking is as good as it looks. Publisher JoWood proudly claims that "turn-based gaming has never looked this good!" and from what we've seen of *Silent Storm*'s impressive visuals, it could really open up the appeal of the genre to the gaming public. The total control over your squad's every move granted to players by a turn-based interface generally comes at the expense of graphical beauty and fluent action, but *Silent Storm* seems determined to overcome such stereotypes. The camera's variable zoom allows players to get as close to the action as they could want, showing off the detailed 3D models and smooth textures in all their glory.

A realistic physics engine adds to the eye candy so customarily absent from the genre, with the fully destructible environments depicting damage inflicted by every bullet and explosion. Whole buildings can be brought crashing down by dealing them enough flack in the right spots, and even ragdoll technology is used to provide entertaining death animations.

The two main campaigns will each feature a series of story-based missions interspersed with randomly generated scenarios as players travel around the map in a non-linear fashion. The vast repertoire of authentic and 'experimental' WWII weaponry, multiple pathways around the indoor and outdoor environments, and a broad range of fully augmentable character skills combine to offer endless strategic approaches to every mission. By giving hard-core strategists full tactical control over every element – whilst keeping things entertaining enough not to deter the casual gamer – *Silent Storm* could certainly earn itself a lot of fans.

"SILENT STORM'S IMPRESSIVE VISUALS COULD OPEN UP THE GENRE TO THE GAMING PUBLIC"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Russia
PUBLISHER: Bigben Interactive
DEVELOPER: JoWood/ Nival Interactive
RELEASE: September '03
GENRE: Turn-based
PLAYERS: 1 (Online TBA)

All the tactical possibilities of turn-based gaming without the associated dullness. And it looks great too.



Not only does *Silent Storm* look great, but there are suits a bit like that one in *Aliens*. Which is always a bonus.

There are a variety of missions on offer, although, strangely, not one that requires you to clean the place up. Tsk.


eMag

SUDEKI



No RPG would be complete without impressive bosses to battle, and *Sudeki* is no exception.

Sudeki's creatures have received just as much attention as the heroes, with the bump mapping and texturing looking particularly effective.

COULD THIS BE THE XBOX TITLE RPG FANS ARE WAITING FOR?

You've got to feel sorry for *Sudeki* – it's still a while from release but has already been criticised on various Internet forums. So what's got everybody's back up? Well, it would seem that developer Climax's biggest sin is that it has the nerve to create a game that's normally the domain of the Japanese. Of course, the sad fact of the matter is that *Sudeki*'s already shaping up into a great title and it'll be a real shame if all this unjustified negativity puts prospective buyers off. Take our word for it – *Sudeki* is great fun and well worth waiting for. From the moment *Sudeki*'s history is played out via some novel shadow puppets (not to mention the superb narration by ex-Doctor Who Tom Baker), you know that a tremendous amount of passion has gone into Climax's latest creation.

The worlds of Hikaria and Kuria have been torn asunder by an age-old war and, in typical RPG fashion, it falls down to a small group of heroes to restore peace to the beleaguered lands. Initially, you only control toughened warrior Tal, but before long you'll meet up with Elco (a steam-punk gunslinger), the sultry sorceress Ailish and Buki, a shape-shifting huntress. While you only ever control one character (sadly, there won't be a multiplayer option) the AI of the remaining heroes is of an extremely high standard and can be easily changed via various D-pad commands.

Visually, *Sudeki* is one of the most breathtaking games we've seen this side of *Panzer Dragoon Orta*. Climax's Trinity System allows real-time shadowing on every character, an incredible array of lighting and particle effects (especially for the characters' *Final Fantasy*-esque Summon abilities) and a staggering amount of impressive textures. Environments are also rich in detail and, while they may include such well-used fantasy locations as snowy mountains and quaint villages, the use of subtle environmental effects and lighting give *Sudeki*'s worlds a refreshingly different look. There are a few frame rate and refresh issues, but Climax assures us that these will be fixed before release.

All this graphical wonderment would amount to nothing, though, if *Sudeki* didn't have the gameplay to back it up – fortunately, Climax has paid just as much attention here as it has to the technical aspects of the game. While all the traditional aspects of RPGs (levelling up, summoning powerful magic and plenty of character interaction) can be found in abundance, it's *Sudeki*'s real-time combat that sets it apart from its peers.

Using a four-tiered combat system that allows for some wonderfully over-the-top moves, Climax is ready to inject some much needed freshness into traditional turn-based combat. There are two attack strengths and by alternating between them you can pull off all manner of flashy combos. One thing we're not too keen on is the bullet-time effect that's used as these moves are pulled off – while they look nice, they do nothing to enhance the gameplay and it smacks of jumping on an ever-accelerating *Max Payne* bandwagon.

With its multiple worlds (Light, Dark and Shadow), an extensive combat and menu system (combat slows to a crawl so you can quickly access various menus) and decent use of the hard drive (so there are no loading times), *Sudeki* could be accused of simply trying to do too much. However, if Climax manages to restrain itself, this could become another essential Xbox title.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Climax Solent
RELEASE: December '03 (US: Q3)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

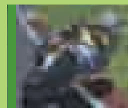
Touted by Climax as a squad-based RPG, *Sudeki* eschews the traditional turn-based combat of most RPGs and adds a healthy amount of Hong Kong-style action to the mix instead.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

One aspect of *Sudeki* that Climax is particularly proud of is the puzzles that are found throughout the various worlds. Each of your four characters has a unique ability ranging from travelling short distances via a jetpack, to pushing and pulling blocks and heavy objects Lara Croft style. Whilst early puzzles are fairly easy (normally needing just one character), they get pretty fiendish once all four abilities are brought together. Luckily, a simple press of the black button will let you cycle through to whichever hero you need. Each hero's abilities are not just used to solve puzzles either – as your party expands, you'll be able to retrace your steps and reach previously inaccessible areas.

"WITH GORGEOUS VISUALS, MULTIPLE WORLDS TO EXPLORE AND SOME EXCITING COMBAT, SUDEKI IS SHAPING UP TO BE AN EXTREMELY PROMISING TITLE"





COMPANY PROFILE

■ Formed in 1988, Climax has since split into six studios – Brighton, Handheld, Los Angeles, London, Nottingham and Solent (home of *Sudeki*). The company has developed a set of development tools called the Trinity System that's used by its four UK-based studios to enhance racing, character and massive multiplayer online games.

HISTORY

■ **MOTO GP 2** 2003 [Xbox]
■ **DIABLO** 1998 [PlayStation]
■ **R-TYPE** 1988 [Atari ST]

■ *Sudeki* will eventually feature over a hundred different creatures to battle, including both Light and Dark World counterparts.

> "THE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IS ONE OF SUDEKI'S STRONGEST POINTS. I THINK WE'VE GOT IT DOWN PRETTY DAMN WELL"
>
> TUOMAS PIRINEN, LEAD DESIGNER

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CHOPPING SUDEKI INTO LITTLE BITS...

FINAL FANTASY x PHANTASY STAR ONLINE x HONG KONG ACTION = SUDEKI

■ Climax's Trinity System has created some amazing-looking environments for the heroes to explore.

CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH



How is that alien a celebrity? He looks nothing like the guy from that Sigourney Weaver film…

Cindy who? Call us uncultured but we've never heard of the jackhammer-toting female…

TAKING OVER WHERE CLAYFIGHTER LEFT OFF?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, GameCube, PS2, PSone, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Gotham Games
DEVELOPER: Take Two
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: Beat-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-2

The MTV series is looking to hit the post-pub gaming market with an iron girder and then pull it from limb to limb.

Everybody loves a good beat-'em-up – the feeling of pummelling a mate into the ground in a friendly grudge match is one that's nigh-on impossible to rival. And while at one end of the fighting spectrum are the technical games – the *Virtua Fighters* and *Street Fighters* that require skill and mastery – sometimes you just want to let go. Sometimes you want to vent frustration in a way that requires far less cranial activity. Sometimes you just want to hit buttons and watch violence. If this is the case, *Celebrity Deathmatch* could be just the game you need. Maybe.

To be honest, the real surprise about this interactive version of MTV's puerile animation (not that we don't enjoy it, of course) is not that it's happening, more that it has taken them so long to get round to doing it. Everything about the series lends itself perfectly to a videogame – the familiar characters, the outrageous antics and the generally relentless action are all represented as expected. Mr. T, Marilyn Manson and all five of *NSYNC (Lance kicking Justin in the face? Sold…) are among what is a fairly modest cast at the moment, but the selection of celebrities does seem tailored for an American audience; a few inclusions do lead us to question Gotham's definition of the word 'celebrity'. An interesting extra, though, is the Create-A-Celebrity mode – we've yet to see this in action but if it allows you to piece together characters that couldn't be included, we're all for it. Otherwise, assembling fictional celebrities would seem rather pointless.

Unfortunately, it's not all good news – the E3 build of the code, while amusing, was far from spectacular. Lacking the level of connection and control the genre requires, there can be no denying that the button-mashing free-for-all is entertaining but that's all it is at the moment. We know full well that sometimes that's all you want from a game, but when we've seen titles like *Power Stone 2* and, to a lesser extent, *Kung Fu Chaos* combine both enjoyment and precision, having one without the other seems much less potent. We've no doubt that this has potential – the licence is a strong and popular one and so long as the problem areas are addressed post haste, we see no reason why this couldn't be an enjoyable party game. Here's hoping…

We're no experts on perishables but we can say for sure that's not an appropriate use for a banana.

"A FEW INCLUSIONS DO LEAD US TO QUESTION GOTHAM'S DEFINITION OF THE WORD 'CELEBRITY'"


eMag

GROUP S CHALLENGE



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SAME OLD FORMAT...

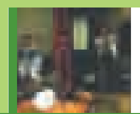
GT3: A-SPEC + PROJECT GOTHAM - NEW IDEAS = GROUP S CHALLENGE

"WITH SO MANY CARS AND CIRCUITS SO ACCURATELY REPRODUCED, GROUP S CHALLENGE LOOKS SET TO BE A MUST FOR XBOX OWNERS"

DAVID MILLER, MARKETING DIRECTOR, CAPCOM EUROSOFT

■ All the cars are real-life models and there's something here to suit every ability.

■ The cityscapes are very attractive but lack the variety of those seen in *GT3: A-Spec*.



COMPANY PROFILE

Capcom became one of the earliest players in the videogame industry when Kenzo Tsujimoto founded the company back in 1979. Since then it has produced some of the most successful games of all time with the enduring *Street Fighter* and *Resident Evil* series still going strong to this day.

HISTORY

- **RESIDENT EVIL** 1996 [PSone]
- **STREET FIGHTER** 1987 [Arcade]
- **1942** 1984 [Arcade]

WILL CAPCOM'S DRIVING SIM HAVE GRAN TURISMO ANXIOUSLY CHECKING ITS MIRRORS?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: September '03
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

Despite some slightly simplified content and a good dose of visual polish, it's the nearest thing to *Gran Turismo* you'll find on Xbox.

If there's one thing the Xbox has never been short of, it's decent driving games. With the magnificent *Project Gotham Racing* on the books from day one, Microsoft's console has since hosted a plethora of quality titles covering every corner of the genre. Whether you're after a heart-pounding fix of OTT speed, a mud-drenched dose of off-road action, or breakneck thrills on two wheels rather than four, the likes of *Burnout 2*, *Colin McRae Rally 3* and *Moto GP 2* should meet your every racing need. One thing the Xbox doesn't have, however, is rights to Sony's revered *Gran Turismo* franchise. But that's a problem Capcom's latest driving sim, *Group S Challenge*, wants to solve with arguably the closest thing to *GT3: A-Spec* you'll find outside the PS2. Everything that gave the *Gran Turismo* series its unique selling points can be found here – from realistic vehicle handling to the money-driven Career mode – albeit with an impressive coat of visual polish and slightly watered-down content.

Despite featuring a less comprehensive selection of cars than *GT3: A-Spec*, *GSC* does boast a respectable line-up of vehicles from 20 real-life manufacturers. The usual suspects from Alfa Romeo to Volkswagen are available to buy as players progress through Career mode, with each model displaying faithfully recreated handling physics. Having taken most of the vehicles out for a test drive, we were genuinely impressed by the appropriate diversity in handling behaviour. The immense power that lurks beneath the hood of the higher spec cars can make them difficult beasts for the beginner to tame, whereas a Fiat Punto should provide a much more gentle learning curve. From what we've played, *GSC* appears to have achieved a very attractive balance between total driving realism and accessible gameplay that tends to be slightly more forgiving than the dynamics of the great *Gran Turismo*.

The graphical superiority of the Xbox has been harnessed by *GSC* to impressively recreate each car and circuit, whilst also providing an appreciably smooth drive. The advanced lighting engine is particularly obvious as reflections of the sky and cityscape are projected onto your vehicle's chassis as you motor along. Taking the notion of polished visuals perhaps a little too literally, all the cars appear to have been meticulously waxed and buffed before each race – you're almost relieved the absence of a real-time damage system ensures you'll still be able to see your face in the paintwork come the chequered flag. The three real-world cities of Monaco, Shibuya and Surfers Paradise, whose streets host a variety of circuit designs, are depicted with equally striking detail, yet once again lack the refreshing variety of backdrops seen in *GT3: A-Spec*.

All told, *GSC* is shaping up to offer a quality racing package, but in attempting to emulate one of the greatest driving sims of all time opens itself up to some stiff comparisons. That said, the game it tries so hard to substitute is two years old now and could soon be left looking extremely outdated if *GT4* turns out to be half the spectacle we're hoping for. Still, for those Xbox owners who do have a *Gran Turismo*-esque hole in their racing collection that *Sega GT 2002* didn't quite manage to fill, *GSC* might just be the game you've been waiting for.

ROAD TO VICTORY

As with *Gran Turismo, Group S Challenge* features an Arcade racing mode and a single-player career campaign. Circuit mode gives players enough credits to buy a lowly Class C vehicle which you'll have to use to raise enough prize money to upgrade to a better model. Players can also earn credits by undertaking a Line-Line challenge or Duel contest. The first of these places markers along the perfect racing line and tasks players with collecting as many as possible in one lap, whilst the latter allows for one-on-one races between custom or aero-part cars.

"GSC APPEARS TO HAVE ACHIEVED A BALANCE BETWEEN DRIVING REALISM AND ACCESSIBLE GAMEPLAY"



Monaco, Shibuya and Surfers Paradise are the locations for the races. Beats Silverstone any day.

FIRE WARRIOR

LESS DICE, MORE GUNS – EXACTLY AS IT SHOULD BE

■ Although one of your weapons remains constant throughout the game, you'll be given upgrades for it every so often that'll make it bigger and better.

It's fair to say that when we first heard about *Fire Warrior*, we weren't that keen. Not being fans of Games Workshop's Warhammer 40,000 franchise, images of bearded men rolling dice sent us scurrying away. Thankfully though, it appears our fears were unfounded – aside from being set in the Warhammer universe (with its numerous races, planets, vehicles and weapons), *Fire Warrior* has absolutely nothing to do with the game that has kept tabletop warfare fans busy for years. You won't find any models to paint, hit points to calculate or armies to command here; instead, developer Kuju Entertainment has made the sensible decision to transplant the entire Warhammer 40k concept into a first-person shooter that everyone can enjoy.

In a nutshell, *Fire Warrior* attempts to carve itself a niche by pinching several good concepts from other FPS games and bundling them together, then adding the Warhammer 40k story for maximum effect. From the pacing of *TimeSplitters 2* and atmosphere of *Medal Of Honor*, to the character development of *Half-Life* and strategy of *Halo*, there's plenty here that will ring bells in the heads of FPS aficionados. Essentially though, the best thing about *Fire Warrior* is that you don't need any prior knowledge of the Warhammer 40k universe to get into it.

As the title suggests, you play a lowly Fire Warrior among the armies of the Tau – a relatively new race as far as Warhammer history goes, according to Kuju – with very little knowledge of the ongoing universal war, which is the ideal premise for people who don't know their Space Marine arse from their Eldar elbow. What's more, it allows you to experience all the depth and intricate storytelling of the Warhammer 40k saga (an epic tale, to say the least) without having to sift through pages of complicated rules or push metal figures across a tabletop, which can only be a good thing.

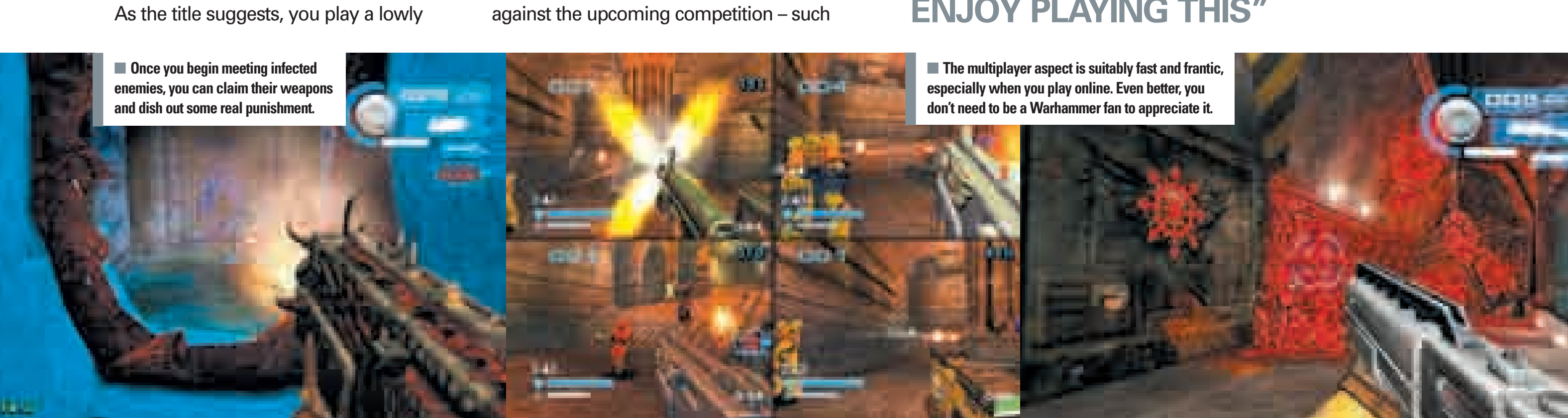
Of course, whether the actual FPS side of things proves to have what it takes against the upcoming competition – such as *XIII* and *Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun* – is another matter entirely. From what we've played so far, it's clear that the game is competent in a number of areas (online and link-up multiplayer being the most obvious) but plays somewhat like *Red Faction 2* – a game we weren't overly fond of simply because it felt so bland. Will that be enough to keep all but the most stalwart Warhammer 40k fans away? We'll find out in September…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC/PS2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Kuju Entertainment
RELEASE: September '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-8 Online)

■ Tabletop gaming with guns, not tables.

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A WARHAMMER FANATIC TO ENJOY PLAYING THIS"



■ Once you begin meeting infected enemies, you can claim their weapons and dish out some real punishment.

■ The multiplayer aspect is suitably fast and frantic, especially when you play online. Even better, you don't need to be a Warhammer fan to appreciate it.


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IS NO GENRE SAFE FROM CEL-SHADING?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2,Xbox, GC, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBC

■ Based on a popular French comic, *XIII* combines a well-structured storyline with a deft mix of stealth and heavy-handed action to good effect.

PS2 **After the fact that the genre is getting flooded with substandard titles, the worst thing about first-person shooters is the general unwillingness to try anything new.** We're sure we aren't the only gamers fed up with practically every shooter going down the generic military route (no, 'space military' is no better) and while we can appreciate the reasoning behind a wartime setting, the genre needs an injection of originality from time to time. Cue *XIII*, the unfolding story of an amnesiac who is found washed up on a beach with just two clues to his identity – a New York bank key and 'XIII' tattooed on his chest. 'What's this?' we hear you cry, 'A shooter with character and a strong narrative?' Oh yes – *XIII* can't come soon enough.

The technique being used to create the stunning visual style is something the clever chaps at Ubi Soft like to call 'Comic Rendering' and it's not just the character models that benefit. Backdrops are obviously geared more towards realism but still use an impressively vivid palette so as to maintain the illusion of a hand-drawn comic-book world. Like it or not, the unique style certainly helps *XIII* stand out from the pack, but as with all forms of cel-shading, stills can never do the game justice.

"COMPARISONS TO GOLDENEYE ARE CLOSER TO THE MARK THAN YOU MAY EXPECT"

Beneath the stylish cel-shaded exterior lies a cunning mix of gameplay elements. As well as the standard guns-blazing sections, some areas require a more subdued approach – hiding bodies and using your 'sixth sense' (a radar of sorts that warns you of nearby enemies) both help you remain inconspicuous. In addition, we've been impressed with the interaction that's been made possible. To save on ammo, how about using bottles, spades and even chairs as impromptu weapons? Throwing smaller objects to cause distractions perhaps? While it may not be the most complex physics integration in the history of gaming, the so-called 'Commando Gameplay' is a damn sight more than most similar titles are attempting and should be applauded.

In fact, it's these elements that make *XIII* what it is, not so much as individual features but through the situations that their clever integration can create. The developers are all too aware of this as well, so expect many a moment when an all-out firefight can be prevented with a little brain power. This opens the game up to a much broader audience – while many parts of the game do reward stealth, planning or initiative, those that prefer more straightforward shooters like *Halo* can run in guns blazing. Naturally, this may prove less effective in certain settings but such is the nature of the game and the mere fact that this choice is offered is commendable.

Despite a few minor technical hitches (the game is still relatively young, let's not forget), *XIII* is stylistically unrivalled in its field. From the unique style and appearance to the on-screen 'oofs' and 'bams' that illustrate fights, we reckon this is about as close as you'll get to playing an actual comic. Thanks to the overall look and the attention to detail highlighted by the frame shake caused by explosions and the sequences that occur after an impressive kill, it's easy to lose yourself in the well-realised comic-book world.

The inevitable comparisons to *GoldenEye* are closer to the mark than you may expect (albeit more due to content than anything else) and if *XIII* turns out anywhere near as good as Rare's seminal shooter, we're in for a real treat come the end of the year.

KEEPING IT REAL

While the cartoon look of the game may be far from realistic, the weapons and locations are remarkably similar to their real-world counterparts. In fact, one of the game's skill settings makes all damage done by weapons realistic, meaning a gunshot wound is more a life-threatening injury than a minor inconvenience. It's not like the game's lacking in realism as it is – you can incapacitate guards with many of the objects you find lying around, hide their bodies or even take foes hostage.

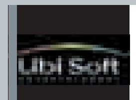


■ *XIII*'s mini comic sequences let you know when you've done something right.



■ The on-screen sound effects add to the comic-book style of the game.





COMPANY PROFILE

Ubi Soft is over 15 years old, having been founded in France in 1986. The firm now boasts offices in no less than 21 countries and has forged its place in the industry as a key player with huge franchises like *Prince Of Persia, Rayman* and the *Tom Clancy* games.

HISTORY

- **DEATHROW** 2002 [Xbox]
- **TONIC TROUBLE** 1999 [Multi]
- **STREET RACER** 1994 [Multi]

Carrying bodies really inhibits your speed and weapon usage, so you'd be advised to do it sparingly.

Thanks to your 'sixth sense', footsteps can be heard – well, seen, anyway.

"THE IDEA FOR CREATING A CEL-SHADED FPS CAME UP SOME TIME AGO – WAY BEFORE WE GOT THE LICENCE FOR XIII"

JULIEN BARES, PRODUCER, UBI SOFT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TURNING THE PAGE ON XIII

GOLDENEYE + COMIC BOOKS - INTERACTIVITY = XIII

Blam indeed. Of course, for the guy on the receiving end, it should be 'Ouch'…

THE SIMS 2



The aim now isn't just to keep your Sims happy, you need to give them a purpose.

"THE MORE ENGAGING THE SIMS CAN BE OVER TIME, THE MORE PEOPLE WILL WANT TO BE PART OF THAT WORLD"
TIM LE TOURNEAU, PRODUCER, MAXIS

The degree of character customisation is astonishing – you can almost clone yourself.



COMPANY PROFILE

Since being founded in 1987 by Jeff Braun and Will Wright (the mind behind the entire *Sim* empire), Maxis has gone from being a two-man operation to one of the leading simulation-based developers in the world. The company's first game, *Sim City*, became the foundation for a franchise that has gone on to sell over seven million copies worldwide.

HISTORY

- **THE SIMS** 2003 [PS2]
- **SIM CITY 4** 2003 [PC]
- **THE SIMS** 2000 [PC]

THE LIFE OF A SIM WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: Maxis
RELEASE: Q1 '04
GENRE: Simulation
PLAYERS: 1

Better graphics, cleverer Sims, more objects and the ability to watch your Sims grow old and die – everything a *Sims* fan could ever want.

When it comes to developing a sequel to a popular game, it needs something that is markedly improved over the original. But while most games plump for a single idea, Maxis has gone overboard with the improvements. You see, with *The Sims 2* there's more – not just of one thing, but of everything. Every single element, from the customisation of your Sim and how they interact with other Sims to what they do, where they do it and even why they do it has been cranked up a notch in order to create a game that surpasses its predecessor in every way.

Of course, much of the enjoyment from *The Sims* comes out of the relationship between you and your Sim, and being able to build him or her up into a character that you can relate to. In this respect, *The Sims 2* makes it easier to build an affinity with your Sim by giving the you almost total control over what they look like, so you could actually recreate yourself with scary accuracy. By taking a basic template that can be tailored to almost any skin and face type, then altering facial characteristics from a selection and finally using sliders to change those features even more, you can turn anyone you want into a Sim. Combine that with the simple method of building your own home (just snap the walls together then decorate to suit your tastes with the hundreds of items on offer) and pretty soon your Sim will be ready to start evolving.

And that's where the fun really starts, as your Sims now have the ability to age. While the key to success still lies in guiding your Sim through 'life's big moments', each Sim also has a Life Score that rates how happy they are with how life is going. Decisions made throughout their life affect how your Sims grow up – from toddler and teenager to adult and pensioner – and therefore determine what they want. Should you choose to pass on certain opportunities like finding love, having kids or getting a successful job (if that's what they want), the Life Score goes down and your Sim becomes unhappy. The game no longer revolves around keeping all your Sims permanently happy for no reason; instead, it's about helping them enjoy a successful and fulfilling life.

New elements in the environment also have a greater effect on the way your Sim develops (for instance, a Sim with a love of pizza will grow fat while Sims who work out get rock solid abs) as well as their relationships with other Sims. Sims now have a greater recognition for each other and can form complex relationships based on love, friendship or family. This is an integral part of the game now – something newcomers and hardened fans will have to learn if they want to succeed.

Not surprisingly, *The Sims 2* will only be the tip of the iceberg as far as furthering the series goes. No doubt Maxis already has a long list of things to include in the first few add-on packs to be released throughout 2004. While it may seem a little unfair for fans to have to start from scratch (after all, they've already paid for pets, holidays and celebrities once – why should they do it again?), it's the nature of the beast for an expandable game like this. Maxis has already proven with the seven add-ons for the original *Sims* that it believes in the adage 'Always keep them wanting more', and obviously it'll do it again. After all, *The Sims* wouldn't be the same without add-ons…

IT'S ALL IN THE GENES

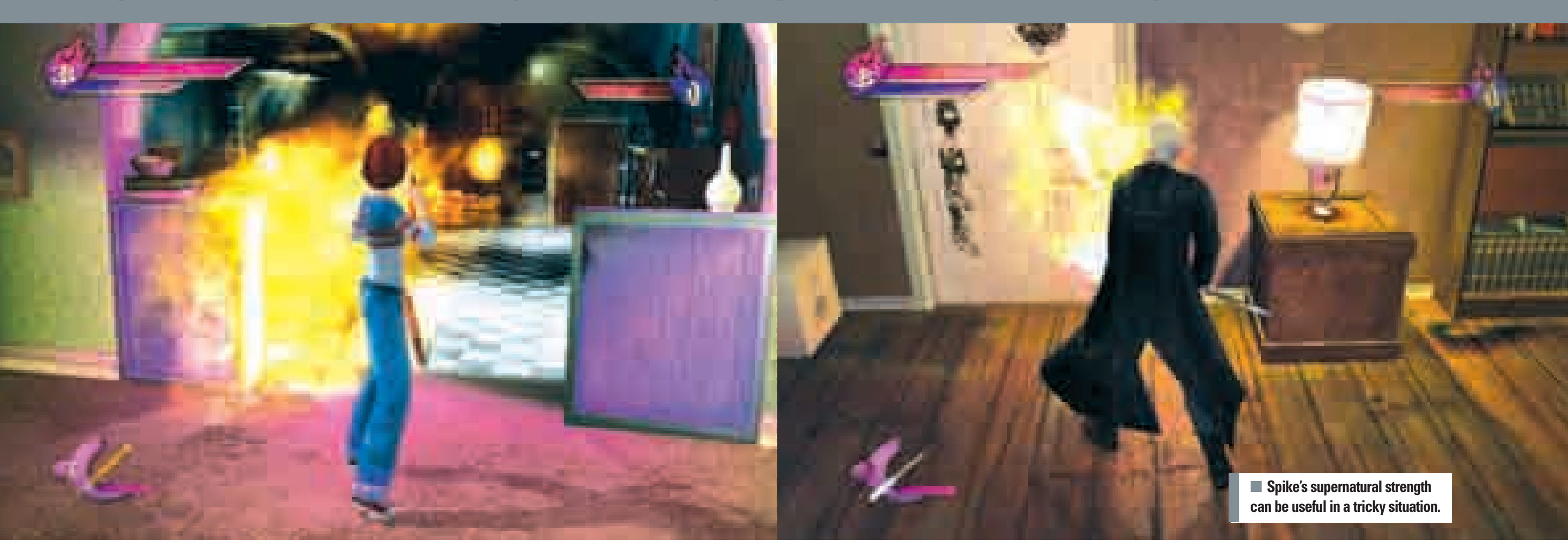
With each Sim now able to grow up and establish romantic relationships, it's only right that they can have children too. However, these aren't randomly generated Sim babies – instead, they're a product of the new DNA system that allows each Sim to pass their genes onto their offspring. By entering the DNA simulator and picking two Sims, you can see their child as it would appear and even check out what he or she will look like as they grow older. Of course, this is just the theory – to actually create the child you'll have to let nature take its course…

"AFTER SEEING HOW MUCH SMARTER THESE SIMS ARE, YOU'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO GO BACK TO THE ORIGINALS"



"Me, a mere collection of polygons, in a hot-tub, with my reputation? Ding dong…"

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLEEDS



■ Spike's supernatural strength can be useful in a tricky situation.

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT THE SLAYER HAD HUNG UP HER STAKE FOR GOOD…

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Eurocom
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ Buffy returns to save the world from the evil undead once again, but this time she's got a little help from her friends.

When some bright spark suggested resurrecting second-rate teen flick *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* as a TV series, no one quite expected the level of success it would achieve. Seven long seasons later and the saga has finally ended, but not before reeling in millions of fans from the 54 countries that broadcast the adventures of the Chosen One. The gaming world was dealt a similar surprise last year when Fox decided to cash in on the *Buffy* phenomenon with an Xbox action adventure title based on the lucrative licence. Far from the lacklustre effort many were expecting, the game was one of the unlikely gems of 2002 and earned a strong following in its own right. Development duties for this sequel are performed by UK-based Eurocom, which seems to have sunk its proverbial teeth into a solid gameplay concept and produced an impressive follow up.

For continuity's sake, the events in *Chaos Bleeds* coincide with the *Buffy* saga between episodes 17 and 18 of season five. Penned by the team behind the TV series, fans can expect the same purposely corny and occasionally witty dialogue to faithfully recreate the tone of the show throughout the game. Further adding to the authentic *Buffy* universe are many of the original cast whose vocal talents combine with some uncanny resemblances to bring their game counterparts to life. Sarah Michelle Gellar and Alyson Hannigan are the only major absentees but are surprisingly not missed as Buffy and Willow, whose parts are played by some talented stand-ins.

As the story unfolds players will not only find themselves taking on Sunnydale's undead in the role of the Slayer herself, but will get to harness the various fighting talents of six fully playable characters. At different stages players are going to find themselves tackling the legions of evil in the shoes of Willow, Xander, Spike, Faith and even Sid the Dummy. Each character has a unique repertoire of combat moves, attributes and special skills that makes for some enjoyable variation in gameplay.

Buffy's own collection of high-kicking combos that brought such celebrated depth to the first game's combat sequences has been enhanced to spice up her slaying abilities. Spike is similarly handy in a fist fight due to his supernatural strength and agility, but the less physically gifted characters must take a different approach to battling the vampire community. Willow, for instance, can use her knowledge of witchcraft and will benefit from an increasingly devastating range of spells as the game unravels. Vertically challenged Sid the Dummy is another interesting case, who hilariously seems to know his way around a stake better than Yoda does a Lightsabre.

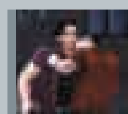
All characters can use various weapons from baseball bats to crossbows and you'll never find yourself short of a wooden stake thanks to the many destructible items of furniture that will shatter into pointy shards. But it's not just the action that's been beefed up – the adventure element has also been furnished with more wholesome puzzles. "It can't ever be just a simple key, can it," exclaims Buffy during the early levels, hinting at the increased need to engage those brain cells.

The enhanced gameplay should ensure *Chaos Bleeds* will not only delight fans of the show, but makes the game a pretty hot prospect for any action adventure fan.

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

As well as increased depth of combat *Chaos Bleeds* also features four enticing multiplayer modes. Along with the six unique combatants with whom players will be familiar from the story campaign, 18 additional characters with diverse fighting styles can be unlocked to compete in the multiplayer contests. Survival mode pits players against each other and NPC enemies in a fight to the death, whilst Domination has you competing to capture as many Control Points as possible within a time limit. Slayer Challenge gives one player the role of Slayer and casts all others as creatures of the night, and, finally, Bunny Catcher has players chasing rabbits for points. Weird.

"BUFFY'S HIGH-KICKING COMBOS HAVE BEEN ENHANCED TO SPICE UP HER SLAYING ABILITIES"



COMPANY PROFILE

Eurocom was founded in 1988 and released its first title, *Magician*, for the NES in 1990. Since these early days the Derby-based team has produced over 50 titles for all major consoles and handhelds covering such prestigious licences as Harry Potter, James Bond and several Disney movies.

HISTORY

- **007: NIGHTFIRE** 2002 [Multi]
- **MORTAL KOMBAT 4** 1998 [Multi]
- **SENSIBLE SOCCER** 1993 [Game Gear]

Force works well, but characters like Willow can use magic too.

"FANS OF THE SHOW WILL EMBRACE BEING ABLE TO PLAY THE PART OF THEIR FAVOURITE BUFFY CHARACTERS"

MICHAEL POLE, GENERAL MANAGER, VIVENDI UNIVERSAL

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PACKING MORE PUNCH

BUFFY + THE SCOOBY GANG x BIGGER COMBOS = BUFFY: CHAOS BLEEDS

Stakes, axes, baseball bats… if you can swing it or chuck it, it's a weapon.

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL



"ENTER A RIVETING NEW ERA OF GAMING, WHERE DIVERSE GAMEPLAY STYLES BLEND INTO ONE UNIQUELY FLUID AND IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE"

UBI SOFT PRESS RELEASE

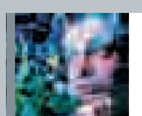
■ Jade is a consummate multi-tasker: aikido, photography, driving a hovercraft, saving the world… easy.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MAKING A GAME THAT REALLY IS ALL GAMES

HAVEN + WARIO WARE - INSANITY = BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

■ More pig than man, this is Jade's uncle, Pey'j. Don't be put off by the snout, he's actually very helpful.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Michel Ancel is the creative force behind *Beyond Good & Evil* and is best known for his renowned *Rayman* franchise. *BG&E* has been his main project for three years now but it remains to be seen what he'll turn his attention to once this is completed…

HISTORY

- **RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC** 2003 [Multi]
- **RAYMAN 2** 1999 [Multi]
- **RAYMAN** 1995 [Multi]

MY WORD, RAYMAN'S CREATOR HAS DISCOVERED LIMBS

Some of you may remember that not so long ago, Midway put out a game called *Haven: Call Of The King*. Branding it "the game that is all games" proved somewhat inaccurate and the ill-fated title failed to perform at retail, now filling many a bargain bin over here and going for as little as $4.99 new in the States. In fact, the game wasn't that bad, more a victim of its own ambition, but it goes to show that such a diverse blend of genres can be a dangerous thing. The reason we recount this tale of woe is a fairly simple one – *Beyond Good & Evil* sports a similar mix of genres but, unlike *Haven*, it has no illusions of grandeur. Better still, this looks as though it could be one mixed bag that actually works…

Coming from the creator of *Rayman*, we were never expecting something that could be considered 'normal' and sure enough, we weren't disappointed. Characters, settings and themes are all dripping with a fairytale style and influence – the beautifully rendered environments (produced using the Jade engine that powers the equally striking *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*) are impressive in their scale and variety. This diversity is matched in the tasks and objectives thrown at you – fighting monsters, stealthy investigative sections, speeding down highways and *Pokémon Snap*-style photography sections all feature already, with the promise of much more to follow. These gel wonderfully since no one part is ever overcomplicated by a huge list of controls to memorise. The combat sections, for instance, offer full 360-degree attack potential with just one button and the appropriate direction, yet still work better than many similar efforts.

One thing that has really impressed us with *BG&E* so far is the cinematic feel it achieves. From the superb score to the well-placed and modest use of slow motion (see, it is possible), you're immediately engrossed by the kind of atmosphere that many real Hollywood tie-ins wish they had – the whole package gleams with quality.

You'll have a good idea of what you need to do in each section from the off, allowing you to choose how to best go about your given task, and from what we've seen this is often open to a fair amount of freedom and planning. Sneak through an area, run in and do battle, avoid it altogether… you're never forced into playing a certain way. Similarly, the in-game camera system resembles that of *Dark Cloud 2*, rewarding the player for exploration and maximum participation but obviously this, like many other optional elements, can be skipped if you'd rather rocket through the game.

Fantasy adventures are massively under-represented in this generation, and all too often those that do make it as far as the shelves are either poorly executed, poorly received or both. We're overjoyed that there are still developers out there who are willing to invest time and money into original franchises such as this – without them, the worrying amount of licensed software and sequels-by-numbers would be even harder to swallow.

If every section of the game has the degree of sheen and involvement that we've seen so far, *Beyond Good & Evil* could turn out to be not only a unique product but also a sleeper hit when it launches this Christmas.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

A quirky fantasy adventure from an individual and a team that have already shown their prowess in game design. Definitely one to watch.

HOW'S MY DRIVING?

Considering that *BG&E* is primarily a character-based action affair, we were pleasantly surprised to find that the driving sections of the game actually work. We're so used to this kind of action being used as a last resort to relieve monotony (*Enter The Matrix*, anyone?) that for it to fit in and play well is a pleasant surprise. Of the two sections we played, one involved a sea battle in a hovercraft while the second saw the same vehicle speeding along a bridge. The former offers a fair degree of choice and freedom while the latter, obviously, is much more linear. Even so, both parts are of an equally high standard as the rest of the game.

"THIS LOOKS AS THOUGH IT COULD BE A MIXED BAG THAT ACTUALLY WORKS"



The locations and atmosphere of the game are stunning – much more cinematic than any Hollywood tie-in.



We've seen two hovercraft sections and they both work very well.

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY – LET SLEEPING DRAGONS LIE…

The point 'n' click adventure is dead, long live the adventure – so says Charles Cecil, managing director of Revolution Software and man behind the game that it seems the entire adventure game community has been waiting ages for. Of course, the fact that the final part of the *Broken Sword* trilogy is set to arrive nearly six years after the last game shows that Revolution isn't in any rush to conclude a series that has sold over two million copies worldwide (can you blame it?) although it's almost as if the developer takes great pleasure in being able to keep so many people waiting for so long…

Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon features the series' heroes George Stobbart and Nico Collard as the main protagonists again and has a storyline so full of murder, conspiracy and ancient mythical legend that you'll need to take an evening class in history just to keep up with the plot. Set several years after *The Smoking Mirror*, the game begins with George in the Congo and Nico in Paris and sees them both drawn into a sinister conspiracy that threatens the entire world. This might sound like the usual adventure game fare (the plot of every *Tomb Raider* game, for instance) but throw in the Knights Templar, a handful of Mayans and a heavy dose of the Voynich Manuscript (a real medieval parchment held by Yale University that even the world's greatest scholars can't translate) and you've got all the ingredients for a gripping and disturbingly realistic plot.

Of course, you've probably noticed by now that *BS: Sleeping Dragon* looks distinctly different from the game's previous incarnations, mainly thanks to the move into third dimension. This obviously conjures up many comparisons (everything from *Resident Evil* to *Tomb Raider*), though Cecil himself compares George's new look to that of Indiana Jones – not just visually, but in the way that he now has the freedom to clamber around and basically act in the way that most third-person action-adventure characters do.

However, before dedicated *Broken Sword* fans go off on a rant about how Revolution has sold the series out by switching from the point 'n' click style to a more action-based game, it should be stated that *BS: Sleeping Dragon* remains a thinker's game at heart. While certain action elements have been incorporated to cover various aspects of movement (climbing walls, moving obstacles and negotiating ledges), these take a back seat to the head-scratching puzzles that appear throughout the game. Even completing some of these lesser action sections requires more mental agility than it does skill with the controller – something which Revolution is keen to emphasise, given that they know how outraged fans of the series would be if it was any other way.

With the emphasis firmly on absorbing gameplay and narrative rather than lengthy cut-scenes and repetitive action sequences, it's clear that *BS: Sleeping Dragon* attempts to take the series (and indeed, the point 'n' click adventure genre) in a new direction, while retaining much of the aesthetic that made it so appealing in the first place. It appears to be working too, but whether that will keep the die-hard fans happy is another question altogether.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC/ PS2/ Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Revolution
RELEASE: October '03
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

George and Nico step into the third dimension as they return to uncover a conspiracy that could end the world. Again.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

In an effort to spice things up a little, *BS: Sleeping Dragon* features a number of 'action events' that require both sharp thinking and good timing – you'll need to learn to use the right items at the right time in order to avoid a potentially dangerous situation. Early on in Nico's adventure, for example, she finds herself on the business end of a revolver with no visible means of escape. Do nothing and she dies, leaving you to start over from the beginning of the scene. However, the more quick-witted among you would have already grabbed the nearby frying pan to deflect a bullet and then slammed the fridge door in the face of her attacker, allowing Nico to make a run for it. Of course, it's not always as easy as it sounds…

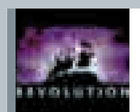
"DESPITE THE THIRD DIMENSION, MANY ORIGINAL POINT 'N' CLICK IDEALS ARE STILL IN EVIDENCE"



Brains are more important than brawn when it comes to solving puzzles.

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

PC/MULTIFORMAT



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Based in York, Revolution Software was set up in 1990 by Charles Cecil and three co-founders – Tony Warriner, David Sykes and Noirin Carmody – who between them have over 60 years of industry experience. To date, the firm has five original games and a number of conversions and licences under its belt.

HISTORY

■ **BROKEN SWORD** 1996 [PC/PSone]
■ **BENEATH A STEEL SKY** 1994 [PC/Amiga/ST]
■ **LURE OF THE TEMPTRESS** 1992 [PC/Amiga/ST]

■ Don't be fooled by this apparently innocuous bathroom – confusing danger is everywhere. Honestly.

"WE'VE GOT TWO MAIN GOALS – TO CONTINUE THE ADVENTURES OF GEORGE AND NICO, BUT TO DO SO IN A WAY THAT PUSHES THE ADVENTURE GENRE FURTHER"

CHARLES CECIL, MANAGING DIRECTOR, REVOLUTION SOFTWARE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PAPA'S GOT A BRAND NEW SWORD

BROKEN SWORD - POINT 'N' CLICK + 3D = BS: TSD

■ George Stobbart has got than a bit of the Indiana Jones about him, both in appearance and actions.

HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA



Player characters can be completely customised and gradually shaped into anything from a mighty wizard to a gourmet chef.

CAN ISTARIA BROADEN ONLINE ROLE-PLAYING HORIZONS?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Artifact Entertainment
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: MMORPG
PLAYERS: Massively Multiplayer

Become a heroic barbarian or peaceful blacksmith and move to the magical world of Istaria.

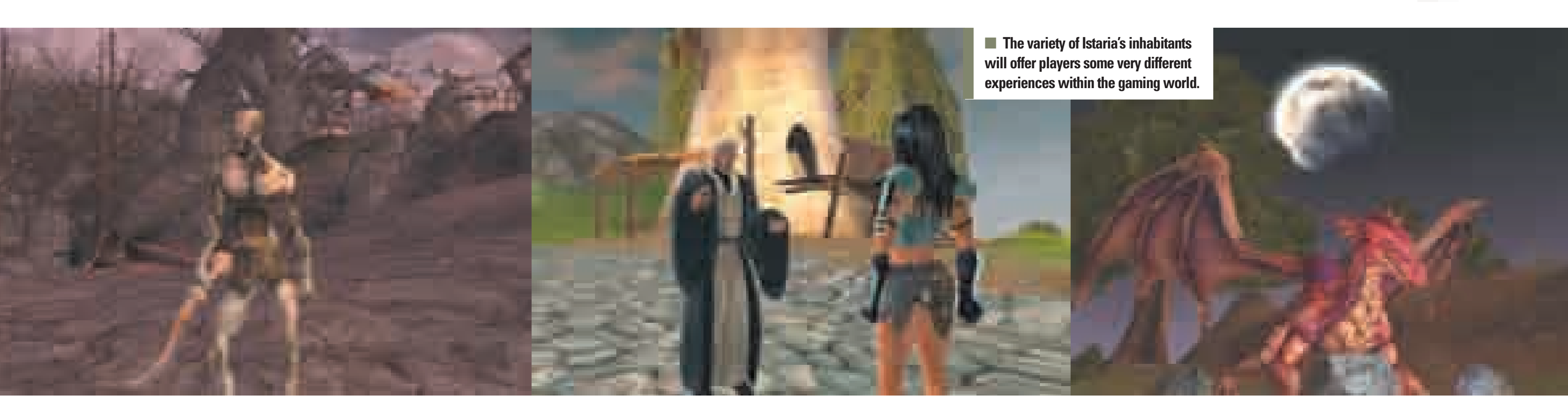
Since *EverQuest* has seen hordes of RPG fans congregating online, the lucrative potential of this gaming concept has prompted some hugely ambitious attempts to create the ultimate MMORPG experience. *EVE Online* took the possibilities for open-ended adventuring into the boundless expanses of outer space, and with hotly anticipated re-creations of both the *Star Wars* and *Matrix* universes in the virtual pipeline gamers will soon have a glut of alternative online existences available to them. So how does *Horizons: Empire Of Istaria* plan to compete with the best of them for our precious evenings and subscription rates?

Horizons returns role-playing to its traditional fantasy setting, yet seeks to bring the magical world to life with greater depth than ever before. The sprawling game environment offers players a collection of varied and imaginative 3D landscapes to explore, whilst allowing characters to shape the world for themselves by getting together to construct their own villages. Indeed, much of the game's immersive quality should come from the vast potential for interaction between various roles. To thrive, the economy needs great co-operation from players, with the gathering of raw materials and skilled craftsmanship needed to forge these into useful items making for a variety of full-time professions in itself. To aid traders and adventurers alike, there's a global marketplace system where players should be able to find the equipment or materials they're looking for, and merchants can post their goods for sale, much like a mythical eBay.

> "THE TRADITIONAL FANTASY SETTING IS REALISED WITH MORE DEPTH THAN EVER"

Those in search of a more dangerous online life will, of course, find the lands rife with opportunity for adventuring and combat. A wide range of character races from dwarves to dragons are available, each with vastly diverse special abilities and inherent traits. Dragons, for instance, must begin as fairly harmless infants before slowly developing their ferocious adult powers and the much-coveted gift of flight.

It all looks like a highly impressive stage for endless gaming possibilities but with the massive investment of time required to get the best out of these persistent gaming worlds, most fans will have room for only one MMORPG in their lives. And with such stiff competition, *Horizons* must deliver something pretty special to outgun its rivals.



The variety of Istaria's inhabitants will offer players some very different experiences within the gaming world.


eMag

ALTER ECHO



■ Enemies are initially a walkover; they do get tougher though…

■ *Alter Echo* enables you to pull off a vast array of combat moves.

■ The action is certainly frenetic but the graphics need some attention.

"ALTER ECHO IS THE TYPE OF INTENSE ACTION GAME IN WHICH OUTRAGE SPECIALISES"

MATT TOSCHLOG, STUDIO DIRECTOR, OUTRAGE GAMES

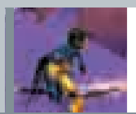
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MIGHTY MORPHING POWER DANTE

DEVIL MAY CRY x GUNMETAL - FUN = ALTER ECHO

ALTER ECHO

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



COMPANY PROFILE

■ Best known for its *Descent* series, Outrage Games was originally part of Parallax Software and has been making games for the last seven years. Based in Ann Arbour, Michigan, Outrage Games eventually became a division of THQ in 2002 – *Alter Echo* is its first original title.

HISTORY

- **RED FACTION II** 2003 [Xbox]
- **DESCENT 3** 1999 [PC]
- **DESCENT** 1996 [PlayStation]





■ Extremely tough to begin with, this eventually becomes one of the best parts of the game.

ORIGINALITY DOESN'T NECESSARILY MEAN SOMETHING'S GOOD

PS2 **In a world full of endless beat-'em-ups and driving games, originality is quickly getting forgotten.** So when Outrage Games' *Alter Echo* won IGN's Most Innovative Design award at this year's E3, we were intrigued to see what all the fuss was about. Now that we've got our hands on some early preview code, we can finally reveal if it's worthy of the praise that's been heaped upon it.

Nevin is a wisecracking Shaper with the ability to alter time and morph his specially created Polysuit between three forms – Melee, Stealth and Gun. You spend most of your time in the default Melee mode – fortunately, being a rather agile chap, Nevin is able to pull off an impressive amount of moves and has the handy ability of juggling his foes into the air and then finishing them off with a variety of sword slashes (think *Devil May Cry*, but slightly less exciting). Stealth mode morphs you into a four-legged gecko-like creature, which in turn opens up a range of new moves and abilities from short bursts of invisibility to pouncing on your enemies and administering a quick death. Finally, Gun mode sees you transform into a huge cannon- and grenade-carrying metal behemoth – though movement is severely restricted you're able to dish out an immense amount of firepower.

It's these three modes that prove to be *Alter Echo*'s trump card; new suits are earned at various stages of the game and you're given plenty of opportunities to put each one through its paces before you receive the next. Once you've got all three, you can really start to appreciate just how much thought Outrage Games has put into its new title. Many levels require numerous shifts between all three forms if you're to successfully negotiate them, and it can be quite satisfying to make your way through some of the later, more complex stages.

Another interesting feature of *Alter Echo* is that the very world you are exploring is actually alive and constantly aware of you. After travelling down to the planet's surface, Nevin discovers that illegal experiments have given the planet's organic skin a human consciousness. What follows is some incredibly hectic gameplay as Nevin becomes quickly embroiled in a deadly battle with the now self-aware world.

Whilst *Alter Echo* has a refreshing amount of new ideas, their implementation leaves a lot to be desired. Outrage's new title borrows heavily from many other games – most noticeably *Devil May Cry* and *Legacy Of Kain* – and while Nevin is capable of a wide amount of moves (many of which can be bought at conveniently placed shops) Outrage has failed to deliver the same panache in pulling them off that is apparent in Capcom's titles. Another big problem is that it's one of the most bland-looking titles we've yet seen on a PS2 or Xbox. Visuals throughout are incredibly garish and sport textures that wouldn't look out of place on an N64. Animation is also shaky, with Nevin lacking the athletic grace or style of Capcom's Dante. However, the worst problem we've encountered so far is the 'groundbreaking' PostFX camera system – it's simply one of the poorest cameras we've ever seen, quickly jumping all over the place whenever Nevin engages in combat.

If Outrage is able to correct the current flaws, we could be looking at a rather promising title; otherwise, *Alter Echo* may quickly get forgotten in a sea of pre-Christmas titles.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Outrage Games
RELEASE: September (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

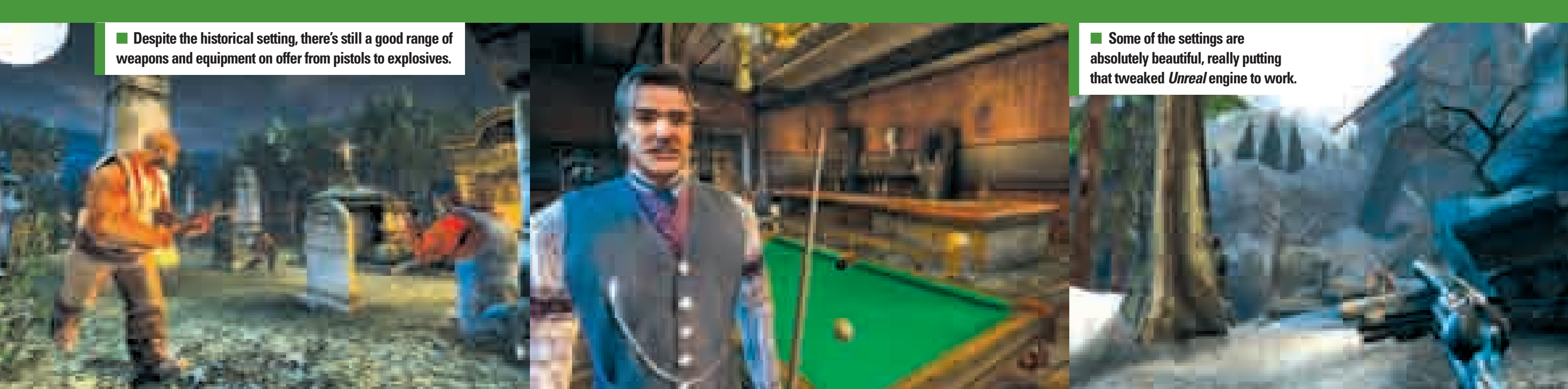
■ THQ's arcade adventure sees you change form, stop time and battle a planet. Who said originality was dead?

LET'S DO THE TIME WARP

One of *Alter Echo*'s most interesting features is its innovative TimeDilation system. Rather than simply hacking your way through countless enemies, Nevin can use TimeDilation to freeze combat and play a frantic mini-game. Taking place on a grid, you must move around by stopping a white line as it passes between two brackets at the bottom of the screen. Each hit means you'll gradually form a path (like in *Snake*) and you can keep building up combos until you either hit your own path or miss the ever-growing white line. Once your combo ends, you're treated to Nevin cutting up all and sundry before he returns to his normal combat mode. Though initially difficult to get to grips with, this is an enjoyable little game in its own right.

"ALTER ECHO HAS PLENTY OF INNOVATIVE FEATURES, IT JUST DOESN'T SEEM TO KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH THEM"

DEAD MAN'S HAND



Despite the historical setting, there's still a good range of weapons and equipment on offer from pistols to explosives.

Some of the settings are absolutely beautiful, really putting that tweaked *Unreal* engine to work.

AND THEY SAID THE WESTERN WAS DEAD…

It doesn't take much more than a brief glance around the racks of your local games shop to tell you that the western is heavily under-represented in modern gaming. Most developers these days are more tempted by the freedom of a futuristic setting where any technology can feasibly exist, but with enough commitment and artistic licence, a historical setting is far from restrictive.

With only a few titles to its name, Human Head may not be one of the biggest names in gaming, but that just makes it all the more impressive that this game, currently only at pre-alpha stage, is shaping up as well as it is.

Based on the *Unreal* engine, the graphics are suitably impressive, but what really stands out at this stage is the impressive attention to detail and the superb physics engine. While we know ragdoll physics are the new stealth, lens flare or whatever last month's fashion was (war, judging by the abundance of military titles at E3), this is one title that actually uses the much-touted system to good effect.

A powerful weapon such as a shotgun can sweep a man off his feet, while shooting a man's steed brings both quickly to the ground, and a complete lack of death animations means the physics engine governs the enemies' final throes. As a result, expect to see some spectacular fatalities and cunning strategies (shoot an enemy in the leg and watch him try to retain his balance) that you won't see in many other games. In addition, the game features a scoring system that allows the player to access a range of special moves and trick shots by performing well in combat, distancing *Dead Man's Hand* from its many rival Xbox shooters.

Since it's not released until the end of the year, this technically impressive shooter still has time to grow and evolve and, with any luck, it'll do just that. Promising co-operative play and Xbox Live support for at least versus modes (online co-op is notoriously much harder to code), *Dead Man's Hand* is already looking sufficiently varied and unique so as to stand out in the crowded Xbox FPS market.

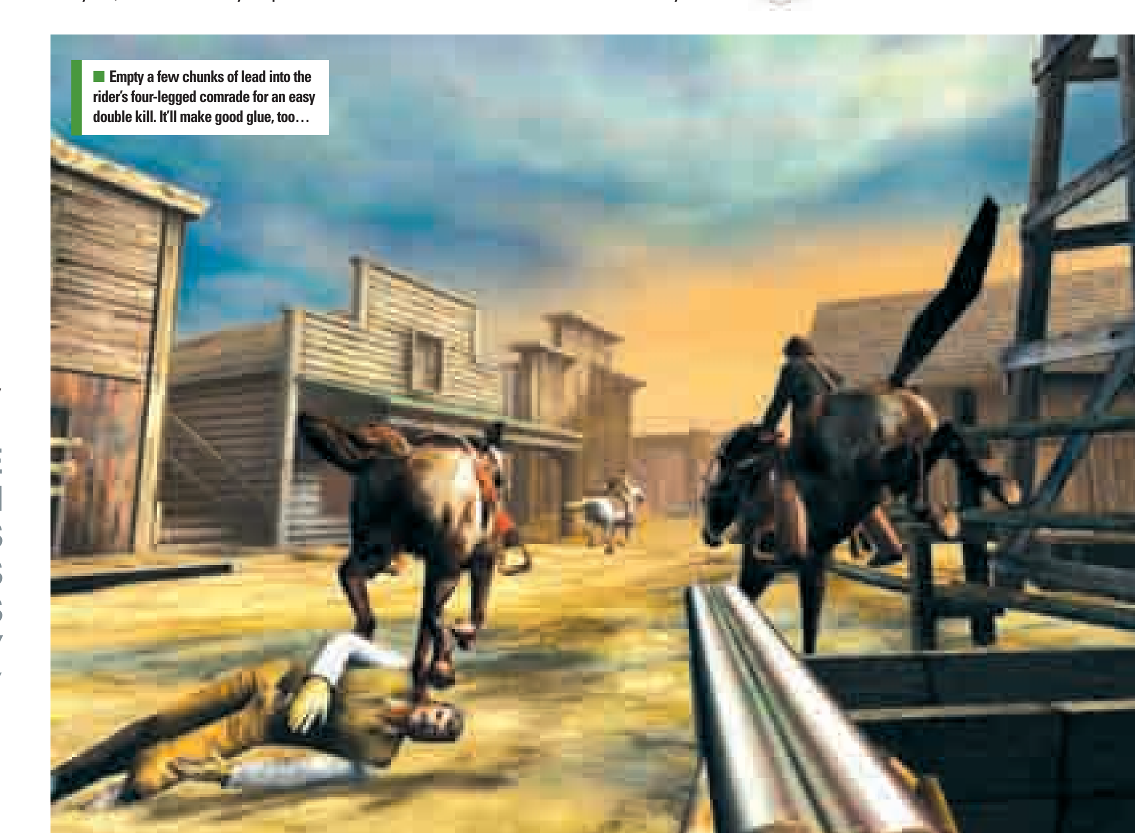
Effectively a more sedate and structured *Serious Sam* in a cinematic wild west setting, we're looking forward to seeing how well the whole package of shooting, riding and revenge can be assembled later on this year.

"A COMPLETE LACK OF DEATH ANIMATIONS MEANS THE PHYSICS ENGINE GOVERNS THE ENEMIES' FINAL THROES"

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Human Head Studios
RELEASE: Q4
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

Journey to the wiki-wiki wild wild west as you blaze into folklore as the most notorious gunman in the west. And no, you don't get to shoot Will Smith.



Empty a few chunks of lead into the rider's four-legged comrade for an easy double kill. It'll make good glue, too…


eMag

SSX3 [WORKING TITLE]

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE WITH THE SOUND OF SNOWBOARDING

PS2 **If you've never played an *SSX* game, then you're missing out.** Really, you are. Even if you're not a big fan of EA, there's no denying that it makes a good over-the-top sports game; the EA Sports BIG range has produced some great titles, with the *SSX* series being one of our favourites. However, it's fair to say that while it was a fine game, *SSX Tricky* short changed a lot of the fans – mainly because it wasn't much more than a rehash of the original *SSX* with only two new tracks and slightly prettier graphics. But now that we've sat down for a few hours with the latest game in the series, we can at least feel content that having spent years milking licences for all they're worth, EA is starting to learn from its mistakes. Well, kind of.

With *SSX3* (a working title), the game has been taken back to the drawing board in an effort to improve every element, as well as to add a whole load more. The basics are still in place; you pick from a collection of over-the-top boarders (six returning characters and four new ones, each with their own unique styles) and then race them down various snowy mountainsides, building up their abilities along the way. However, whereas that was pretty much the whole game before, it's now just the tip of the iceberg thanks to EA Canada's attempts to open the gameplay out in a *Tony Hawk*-esque way.

For starters, the mountain is totally open to you in terms of exploration. Split into three different peaks (each with its own selection of areas to explore), you can pretty much go wherever you please – although naturally, travelling uphill isn't possible so you'll have to keep your eyes open for alternate routes along the way. Indeed, you'll often spot grindable logs and floating collectables overhead as you speed along, indicating a missed path for you to find later.

It's this freedom that also offers the choice of what to do on each peak; certain path splits mark the entrances to various events (from regular races and Big Air competitions to Slope Style exhibitions and Super Pipe contests) which you can choose to enter (or not) depending on how you want to play the game. EA is keen to emphasise that while there's an air of structure about the game, players can go about it however they want, picking events and exploring areas in the order they see fit, in pretty much the same way as the *Tony Hawk* games.

A host of improvements have been made to other areas of the game too; for instance, the trick system has been given an overhaul of sorts, allowing for more insane stunts and easier control of rotation, as well as enabling bail recovery for when you crash out. There's also an expanded character customisation system, a licensed soundtrack featuring artists such as NERD and Queens Of The Stone Age, and the visual effects now include swirling snowstorms, crosswinds and even avalanches that can be used to increase your score by doing tricks through them.

Needless to say, this is shaping up to be the best *SSX* we've seen so far. More importantly, we're impressed at how hard EA is trying to get away from just churning out the same game as before. Could this be the start of a new era for the EA brand? You never can tell…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA Sports BIG
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-2

■ It's *SSX*, but more so – players now have the freedom to do pretty much whatever they want.

CHALLENGE ANNEKA

While they're not as integral a part of the gameplay as in the *Pro Skater* games, *SSX3* still takes a page out of Tony's book and features unique challenges for you to complete at various stages of your descent down the mountainside. You'll find them in the form of markers that can be grabbed as you speed past, ranging in colour depending on the difficulty of the task. Collect a marker and you'll immediately be presented with a challenge to complete – anything from grinding certain ledges or logs, jumping a certain distance off a ramp or even completing a Big Air contest while getting as little air as possible. With over a hundred different tasks on offer, it'll take you a while to find them all, and even longer to actually complete them…

"IT LOOKS AS THOUGH SSX3 WILL PUSH ALL THE RIGHT BUTTONS AS FAR AS QUALITY GOES"



■ Perform tricks and stunts for greater rewards. Pack a sweater too, it's cold out there.





DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1991 following the takeover of Distinctive Software, EA Canada is the largest software developer in Canada and comprises multiple teams within its Vancouver HQ. In July 2002, it bought Black Box Games – the Vancouver-based developer behind *SEGA Soccer Slam* and *NHL Hitz 20-02*.

HISTORY

- **SSX** 2000 [PlayStation2]
- **NEED FOR SPEED** 1994 [3DO]
- **FIFA INTERNATIONAL FOOTBALL** 1993 [Mega Drive]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SLIP-SLIDING AWAY WITH SSX3

SSX TRICKY + TONY HAWK + FREEDOM = SSX3

"THE SSX TEAM HAS SPENT ALMOST TWO YEARS WORKING TO IMPROVE THE CORE EXPERIENCE BY ADDING LOADS OF NEW WAYS TO PLAY"
EA SPORTS BIG PRESS RELEASE

■ If you fancy it, you can grind logs and other bits of scenery that litter the mountainside.

■ The number of routes open to you as you hurtle downhill gives the game good replay value.

■ The graphics have been overhauled to create a suitably authentic snowy atmosphere.

HARDWARE: ONLINE ARENA



The speedier vehicles tend to be able to reach the better power-ups more easily, hence this David and Goliath situation…

SONY MAKES TRACKS TOWARDS ITS ONLINE GOAL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '03
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1-16

Hardware rewrites the book on arcade-style military action. Now give me something to break…

PS2 **The online shooter is commonplace nowadays, and more often than not pits your chosen soldier against a world of similar combatants.** One of the main problems with this is evolution – seeing as how rocket launchers and other such extravagances are two a penny, where can trigger-happy gamers get their power trips? There's a simple solution to this – tanks. Guns so heavy that they need to be carried by large tracked vehicles. If these tracked behemoths can't satisfy your destructive needs, get help. No, really.

Car combat is a far from original idea – in fact, it's a notoriously difficult genre in which to develop a quality title. Just look to *Cel Damage* or, to a lesser extent, *Twisted Metal* for proof, if such is needed. Thankfully though, *Hardware* is already shaping up to be substantially better than both of these…

Perhaps most impressive so far is an oft-overlooked element in games such as this – balance. Rather than having a few horribly overpowered vehicles and a few pointless ones, *Hardware*'s automated cast is much fairer, and players opting for more powerful choices such as the tanks will soon get used to weaker jeeps and buggies running rings around them.

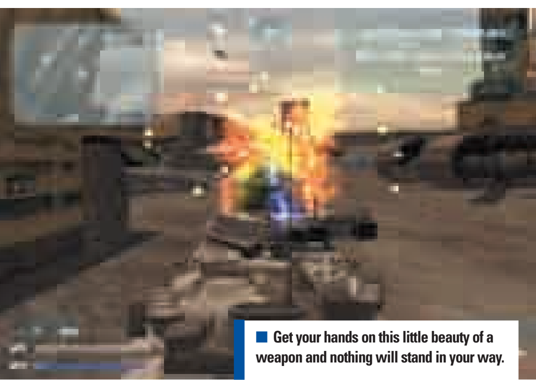
> "THE STRONG-ARM APPROACH PROVES THE GAME'S BEAUTY IS MORE THAN JUST SKIN DEEP"

Graphics and sound may be little more than passable but so long as this is an intentional move to make online play run more smoothly (which would certainly seem to be the case), we'll quite gladly let this slide. Either way, *Hardware* isn't going to be winning any awards on account of its beauty or intelligence – the strong-arm, no frills approach it adopts capably proves its beauty to be more than just skin deep.

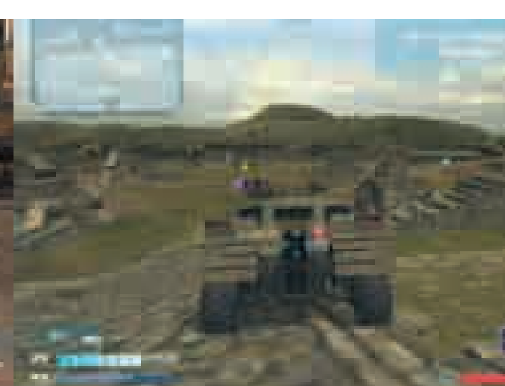
Obviously, those seeking an original experience or an engrossing storyline won't find either here, but what *Hardware* will offer is an enjoyable exercise in destruction. At this stage, lag is fairly rare and unproblematic which can only be a good sign for the release of the game (by which time optimisation should have eradicated this and a few other teething problems), but from the commendable implementation in the early multiplayer version, we can see this one surprising a few people. The deceptive attempt at realism hides an undeniably arcadey core and while the jury is still out on the worryingly floaty physics (just watch those tanks fly), the whole experience holds up well so far.



Unfortunately, the multi-storey industrial digger isn't one of the eight starting vehicles.



Get your hands on this little beauty of a weapon and nothing will stand in your way.




eMag

GLADIUS



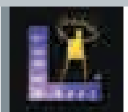
Gladius' world map allows you to further expand your journey and find more leagues to compete in.

Urlan makes sure his competitor has got the point.

Don't be fooled by the armour and the super-human muscles, he's just a pussycat, really…

"GLADIUS TAKES ACTION RPG TO A WHOLE NEW LEVEL, AND SIGNALS LUCASARTS' RETURN TO ORIGINAL GAME DEVELOPMENT"
TOM BYRON, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MARKETING, LUCASARTS





COMPANY PROFILE

■ Creators of the excellent SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion) point 'n' click interface, LucasArts is known for its quirky humour and fantastic plots. It's also responsible for expanding the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* licences, although recent releases have been a little lacklustre.

HISTORY

- **X-WING** 1994 [PC]
- **THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND** 1990 [Amiga]
- **BALLBLAZER** 1984 [Atari 2600]

AND YOU THOUGHT TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAMES WERE BORING…

If THQ's *Circus Maximus* taught us one thing, it was that the world isn't quite ready for gladiator-themed games – especially if said games feature poorly implemented chariot racing and unexciting gameplay. That's why when LucasArts announced *Gladius*, we were less than enthusiastic at the thought of playing what looked like a rather basic gladiatorial fighter.

As the cliché says, though, 'looks can be deceiving' and beneath *Gladius*' rather basic-looking appearance lurks the closest that PS2 and Xbox owners will get to the excellent *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. Like many other tactical RPGs, *Gladius* combines a rich story with absorbing (though easy to understand) gameplay mechanics. It also adds a few new ideas to further enhance an already solid genre – namely increasing player interaction and using an intriguing combat system.

Rather than simply pressing a button to attack, *Gladius* uses a swing system that shares many principles with your average golf title. A button press builds your swing power – the closer you get to the red target, the more chance you'll have of scoring that all-important critical hit, and as your warriors progress in skill, you'll be able to pull off a whole string of combos with which to impress the bloodthirsty crowds. Keeping the crowd sweet is essential, as currying their favour boosts the potency of your warriors' attacks, but perform badly and things turn against you. Another unique feature awards you a second turn while your opponents are moving – this ensures not only that turns overlap and run more smoothly, but it also allows clever players to use their characters more effectively. However, this innovative combat system, while an extremely nice touch, isn't perfect. The fact that your carefully timed hits can still be blocked or dodged makes the whole exercise rather fruitless.

Gladius' story revolves around Valens, an educated warrior, and Ursula, the daughter of a barbarian king who has led a sheltered life due to her mysterious magical powers. Each hero starts off unaware of the other and concentrates on entering various tournaments, as well as recruiting from a wide range of warriors. Amazons are fearless females with a hatred of men, Berserkers sport strange tattoos and seemingly fight without feeling pain, while the Gungnirs specialise in deadly long-ranged attacks. You can negotiate the various lands of *Gladius* via a handy world map – make your way to a new village and you can start recruiting warriors on a permanent or casual basis or visit the shops that trade in gossip as well as weapons. You can also choose to fight in small leagues or sprawling tournaments.

Of course, it's fortunate that *Gladius* has involving gameplay because its visuals are nothing special. As it stands, animation throughout the game appears extremely basic and often belies its 128-bit roots. Many of the characters amble about like they've been in one fight too many and the low polygon count and general lack of detail (especially in the rather poor-looking cut-scenes) may do little to persuade the casual buyer that this is worth picking up.

Graphics aside, *Gladius* seems to be coming along nicely and looks set to be a much deserved break from the typical console fare currently dominating the market. With a little more refinement, this could have the makings of a great game.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PS2, GameCube
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: LucasArts
RELEASE: September '03 (US: August '03)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

■ LucasArts takes a brief rest from churning out its many *Star Wars* titles and instead treats us to an enjoyable gladiator-based RPG.

LET THE GAMES BEGIN

Taking part in bloody fights to the death every day can be tiring to say the least. Fortunately, LucasArts has kindly given players a variety of events to help ease that battlefield tension. King Of The Hill involves clambering onto some precariously placed crates as quick as you can – once there, you can hack, slash and generally slay your way to victory – while another competition sees you having to destroy a set number of barrels before your opponent. Although these events are pretty rare, they require a different set of tactics from the main game and make for a refreshing change of pace. Like the main battles, these diversions will pay you with gold, which can be put towards the latest lo-tech weaponry.

"IGNORE THE RATHER UNINSPIRED LOOKS – THIS IS A SATISFYINGLY COMPLEX STRATEGY GAME"



■ Ursula uses her magical abilities to enhance her defences.

FINAL FANTASY X-2



Quests vary in length and difficulty – something for everyone, then.

A SUMMONER'S WORK IS NEVER DONE…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Square Enix
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1

The first true sequel to a *Final Fantasy* game, *X-2* follows Yuna after the events of *FFX* as Square Enix embraces its feminine side.

PS2 **We've heard some impressive videogaming tall tales in our time.** Hidden characters, secret areas, ports that could never happen… In this gossip-filled industry it's getting harder to distinguish between curious truths and dirty lies. This is why initial reports of a sequel to *Final Fantasy X* were a little hard to swallow – not only did it seem unlike the sort of thing Square would do but we just couldn't see a sequel to a *Final Fantasy* game working. But we were wrong, and the game has been pleasing Japanese gamers for a while now, meaning we've had ample time to get to grips with the first *FF* sequel.

By now, you'll know that Yuna has stepped up from Tidus' supporting female to fully fledged lead role, but what may not be so clear is that this is far from the same Yuna we know and love. *X-2* is set several years after the finale of the previous game and when the young Summoner stumbles across a sphere that depicts a strangely familiar figure, she sets out to track down Tidus. This leads her to cross paths with former ally Rikku and newcomer Paine, and thus the videogame equivalents of Liu, Diaz and Barrymore (Drew, not Michael) form their unlikely posse and take to the road. By the looks of things, they've brought their entire wardrobes with them too… The Dress Up system is a lot more than just the gimmicky fan service element it first seems – changing costumes has a very real tactical impact. Your party will gradually gain proficiency with their preferred class, meaning more frequent and powerful attacks become possible and new skills can be learned. Switching outfits mid-battle triggers spectacular cut-scenes reminiscent of Yuna's days of Summoning (a power she no longer needs) and as in the previous game, certain enemies will have weaknesses that must be exploited with the right choice of clothes. Quirky maybe, but as a glorified version of *FFV*'s Job system it works remarkably well.

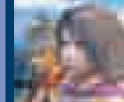
Another key difference between *X-2* and its predecessor is the game's structure. Criticisms levelled at the overly linear nature of *Final Fantasy X* have not gone unnoticed and while the new mission-based flow may still not approach the freedom of some of its rivals, it does go some way to alleviate the feeling of being pushed in one direction. Individual missions are greatly varied in terms of difficulty and length so for every epic quest you embark upon, expect a quick and simple task somewhere down the line. Be it working up to and defeating a boss or simply talking to a few people, one of the best things about this new system is that it really keeps you guessing as to what comes next – no more running from A to B ad infinitum, instead there's choice and variety in spades.

The game manages to improve on *X*'s already impressive style with slightly sharper graphics and cut-scenes that wouldn't look out of place in a Hollywood blockbuster. Music is of the same high standard, encompassing a broader sonic spectrum than ever before, and although differences in style between traditional RPG pieces and the more light-hearted J-pop tunes are obvious, the contrast is curiously effective. This contrast is reflective of the package as a whole – beneath the kitsch-cool surface hides one of the best battle systems Square has given us. We can't wait to get our hands on an English language version of the game – if nothing else, it'll be interesting to see how the localisation process treats Yuna's quest…

MATERIA GIRL

While only a fool would write *X-2* off just because it's a sequel, there is some confusion as to why *Final Fantasy X* has been chosen as the first game in the long-running series to receive a true follow-up. Arguments about which instalment would be best suited to a successor have been rife since Yuna's return was announced – a remake of *Final Fantasy VII*, GBA ports of the SNES games and more sequels are all in the pipeline if you believe the rumours. Until we get an official line from Square Enix (who remains tight-lipped as to which will be the final *Fantasy*), we'd advise taking the gossip with a pinch of salt. That said, we'd welcome Cloud's return with open arms…

"THE DRESS UP SYSTEM IS A LOT MORE THAN JUST THE GIMMICKY FAN SERVICE IT FIRST SEEMS"



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Square Enix is a relatively young firm but its two component superpowers date way back to the 8-bit era. Between them, they have put out some of the most important RPGs in gaming and continue to do so to this day.

HISTORY

- **DRAGON WARRIOR MONSTERS** 1998 [GBC]
- **CHRONO TRIGGER** 1995 [SNES]
- **FINAL FANTASY** 1987 [NES]

> "TRUE TO THE SERIES TRADITION, FINAL FANTASY X-2 HAS ADVANCED GAMING TO NEW LEVELS AND IS SET TO BE A LANDMARK TITLE"
> *SQUARE PRESS RELEASE*

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

UNDERSTANDING THE GIRLS' NIGHT OUT

FINAL FANTASY X + BETTER COMBAT + GIRL POWER = FINAL FANTASY X-2

■ The battle system is Square's most advanced yet, even if the Dress Up system sounds odd.

SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

WORLD RACING

VORSPRUNG DURCH TECHNIK AND ALL THAT

Format:	PS2/GameCube/PC
Origin:	Germany
Publisher:	TDK
Developer:	Synetic
Release:	September '03 (GC: TBA)
Genre:	Racing
Players:	1-2

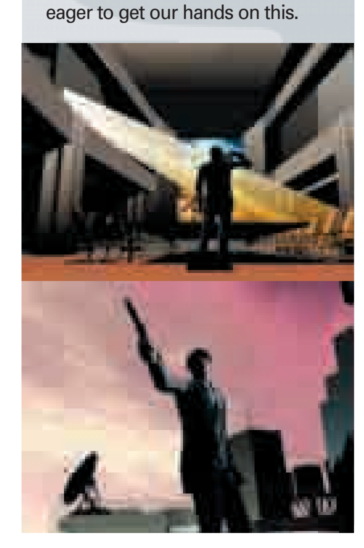
It might already be out on the Xbox, but now TDK's slick Mercedes racing sim is about to appear on PC and PS2, with a GameCube version lurking further down the road. Despite being one of the most aesthetically pleasing driving games on the Xbox, the PC version looks to exceed these heights with some achingly gorgeous scenery and meticulously detailed vehicles. Obviously, you've still got over a hundred Mercedes cars to choose from – accurately recreated and ranging from Thirties racing models to modern day prototypes – but the big difference is the price; PS2 and PC gamers will be able to pick up this quality piece of engineering for an irresistible £19.99.

KILLER 7

NUMBER SEVEN WITH A BULLET

Format:	GameCube
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Capcom
Developer:	In-House
Release:	TBC '04
Genre:	Adventure
Players:	1

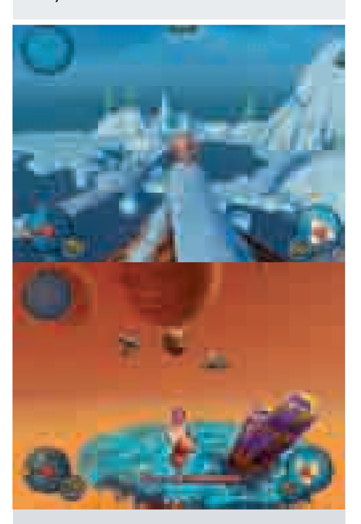
We've waited for ages, but finally Capcom is starting to let out details about its film noir-style action adventure… and it's really weird. Set in a dystopian future where nations have crumbled and the world is plagued by violent people wearing crazed smiles (no, really), it's up to schizophrenic assassin Harman Smith to uncover the truth behind his girlfriend's death. Of course, he'll need the help of his seven individual personalities to do this (hence *Killer 7*), each of which has its own unique abilities and strengths depending on the situation. It sounds bizarre, but with such an intriguing concept and interesting graphical style, we're eager to get our hands on this.



WORMS 3D

AND HIS NAME IS WIGGLY WOO

Format:	PS2/Xbox/GameCube/PC
Origin:	UK
Publisher:	SEGA
Developer:	Team 17
Release:	October '03
Genre:	Strategy
Players:	1-4



Everyone likes *Worms*, right? Of course they do. While it might not be the most complex game around, the frantic action offered by a good four-player *Worms* match is exactly what the doctor ordered when you've got your mates round. And now Team 17 is taking things to the next level with *Worms 3D*; essentially the same game as before, complete with familiar weapons, silly voices and plenty of exploding annelids (worms, to you and me), but in 3D. Obviously, this makes things far more strategic and offers more opportunities for sneaky attacks, which can only be a good thing. Even so though, we can't help but feel slightly anxious that it won't be as good as it used to be…

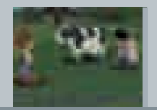
THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

MILKING THE SIMS COW ONE MORE TIME

Format:	PS2/Xbox/GameCube/GBA
Origin:	US
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	Maxis
Release:	Q1 '04 (GBA: Dec '03)
Genre:	Simulation
Players:	1

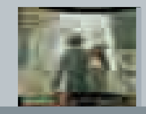
Considering the first console version of *The Sims* flew to the top of the charts, you'd be a fool not to think that there'd be a follow-up in the pipeline. Obviously, the main console versions of *The Sims: Bustin' Out* look pretty similar to the last one (no surprise, seeing as that's how it's worked with the PC add-ons since it first came out), but there are several important differences – namely the ability to leave your house and visit numerous other locations, as well as pick different career routes for your character as it progresses through the game. Of course, with the £40 price tag you have to wonder whether people will be prepared to buy a similar game all over again.





DELAYED – HARVEST MOON (GC/GBA)

■ Maybe it's got something to do with the extraordinarily hot weather, but Ubi Soft's crops don't appear to be quite ready yet – both versions of *Harvest Moon* have been delayed in the UK until the end of October.



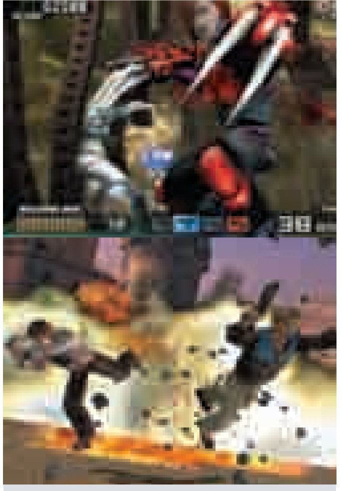
CANNED – RED DEAD REVOLVER (PS2)

■ With Angel Studios getting snapped up by Rockstar Games and the game vanishing from Capcom's release list, it looks like this western blaster has been axed. Unless Rockstar releases it instead, of course…

TIME CRISIS 3

THE CLOCK'S STILL A-TICKIN'…

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Namco
Release: November '03
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Players: 1-2



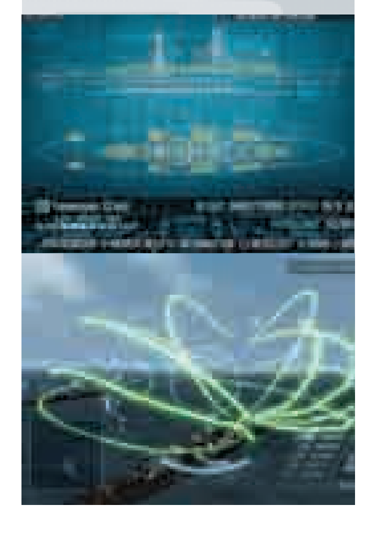
If there's one PS2 peripheral that's sorely unappreciated, it's the G-Con lightgun – with only one decent game released for it in the last year (*Resident Evil: Dead Aim*), you could be forgiven for letting it gather dust rather than putting it to good use. But now Namco has finally got round to converting *Time Crisis 3* (which we reviewed in issue 3) from the arcade to the PS2 and things are looking up once again for the poor old G-Con. Thankfully, there are additions on top of the original arcade action to keep home players happy – with more Crisis Missions and an all-new Rescue Mission mode (featuring a sniper scope, no less), you'd better get that gun out of retirement pretty soon…

NAVAL OPS: WARSHIP GUNNER

YOU CAN SAIL THE SEVEN SEAS, IN THE NAVY

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Koei
Developer: In-House
Release: October '03
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1

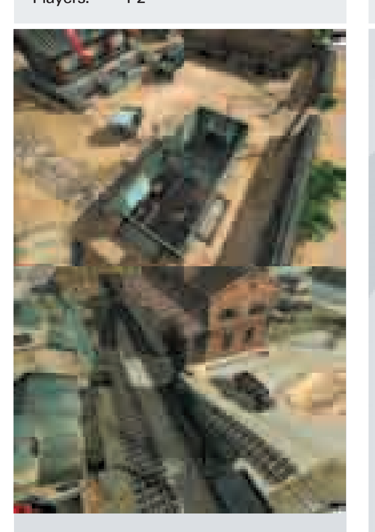
If you're the kind of person that likes blowing things up, but have an aversion to land, there's always the naval option. No, it's not your bellybutton – we're talking about ships, and big ones at that. Sure, so it might not sound like the most appealing console title around, but Koei's *Naval Ops: Warship Gunner* is still a relatively intriguing prospect. Basically, you can design your own hulking battleship, then take it out onto the ocean waves and blow stuff up – then use the cash you get for succeeding to build a bigger, more powerful vessel. Toss in a comprehensive WWII mode and more ships than the British fleet and you've got what could be a unique little title…



KOREA: FORGOTTEN CONFLICT

A HARSH LESSON IN KOREAN HISTORY

Format: PC
Origin: Czech Republic
Publisher: Cenega
Developer: Plastic Reality
Release: October '03
Genre: Action/Strategy
Players: 1-2



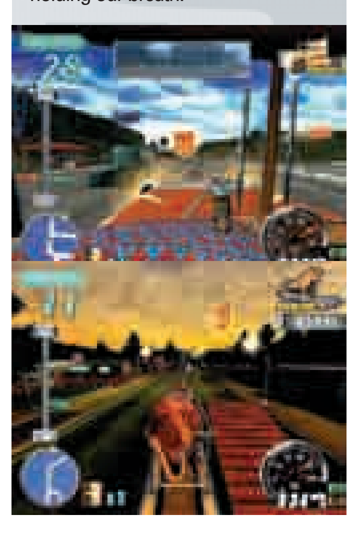
While the sublime *Commandos 3* looks set to dominate the 'squad of crack commandos running around behind enemy lines' genre, it might not be the only example worth looking for in the coming months. Putting players in charge of a team of elite soldiers, *Korea: Forgotten Conflict* gives you a variety of heroic feats to undertake during the war between North and South Korea. In case you'd forgotten all about this particular conflict, Plastic Reality has immaculately recreated the scene with a collection of stunning 3D environments that can be fully panned and zoomed to your heart's content. Mix in the finely tuned AI and the stage is set for some engrossing real-time strategy.

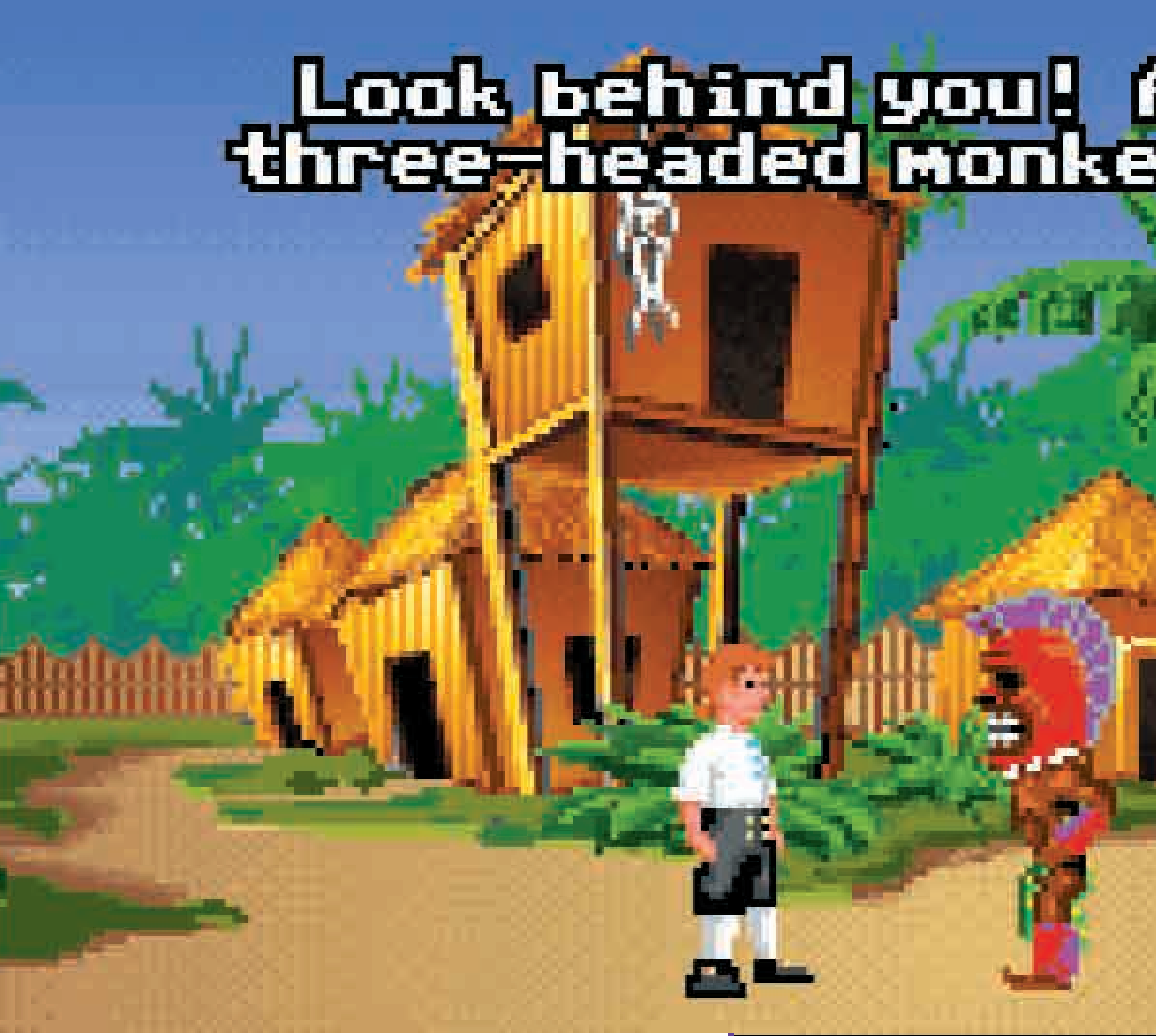
THE KING OF ROUTE 66

UH-HUH-HUH – THANK YOU VERY MUCH

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SEGA
Developer: AM2
Release: September '03
Genre: Racing
Players: 1-2

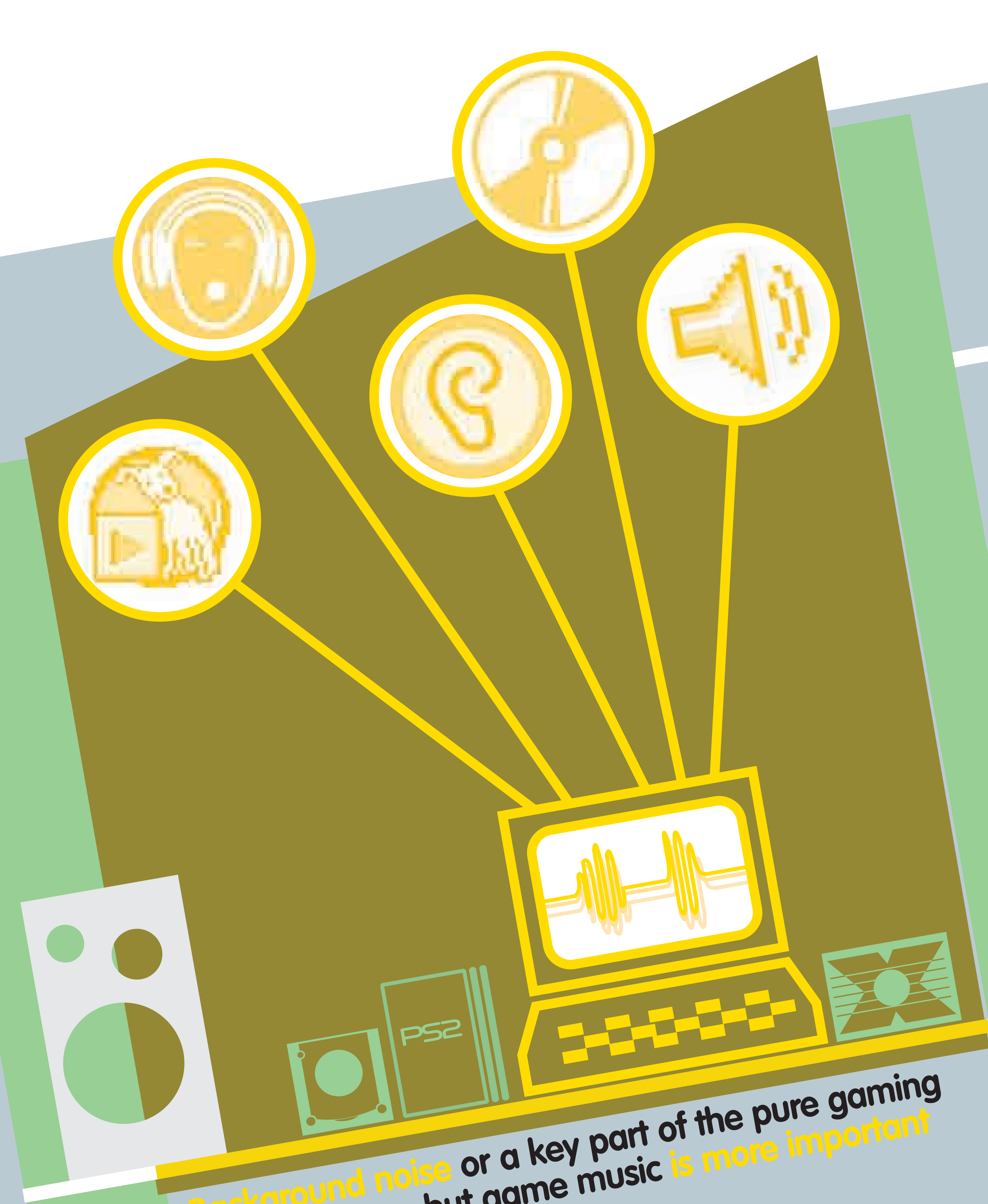
Let's face it – while the arcade game was relatively good fun, SEGA's *18 Wheeler* was a major letdown when it hit home consoles thanks to a lack of extras and no real replay value once you'd finished it. So hopefully the same fate won't befall its sequel, *The King Of Route 66*, when it hits the PS2 in September – although from the looks of things, SEGA is trying to cover all the bases. Essentially, it's an upgrade of the previous game – more mini-games, longer tracks, better multiplayer and even a Queen Of Route 66 mode where you race to impress ladies and upgrade your rig. It all sounds okay but given the game's lacklustre performance stateside, we're not holding our breath.





Now there's something you don't see every day **Secret Of Monkey Island Macintosh [LucasArts] 1990**





Background noise or a key part of the pure gaming
it half the time, but game music is more important

SOUNDING OFF

experience? You might not notice
than you may have ever imagined…

“First, it should set the right mood for the overall game in general and for the specific part it's being attached to. Second, the music has to pump energy and enhance the drama, again, without attracting too much attention to itself. Third, the music should be the glue for the entire game”

While the focus of games is usually on the quality of the visuals, the polygon count and the amount of FMV sequences that can be crammed into a product, the role of music is often ignored – yet it plays an integral part of the gameplay experience. Would the death of a certain flower girl in *Final Fantasy VII* make such an impact if it wasn't for the accompanying orchestral music? Could the same sense of fear be evoked in *Resident Evil* if not for the eerie silences and gristly skull-crunching noises from a man-eating zombie? Even the thumping, repetitive beats of *Space Invaders* manage to instill panic into the gamer, which increases as the aliens creep down the screen.

Music therefore plays a role that can't be overlooked. In order to be successful, music needs to enhance the mood and atmosphere while at the same time setting the pace of the game so the player feels immersed within the world that has been created. “In videogames, like film, the music has several tasks it needs to achieve,” says Inon Zur, a composer for games such as *Baldur's Gate II* and *SOCOM: US Navy Seals*. “First, it should set the right mood for the overall game in general and for the specific part it's being attached to. Second, the music has to pump energy and enhance the drama, again, without attracting too much attention to itself. Third, the music should be the glue for the entire game. It has to bridge smoothly between the scenes and give the game the overall artistic envelope.”

The Creation Process

Much like an artist painting a masterpiece, the creation process for music varies according to the musician. More often than not, a company will specify what it's looking for in the game and then leave the composers to come up with their own techniques and ideas. Some, like Inon Zur, start off with “a certain concept – an idea, picture story or scene. This evokes in the trained composer some musical ideas, perhaps a short theme or rhythmical pattern. Then the composer will develop this idea into a full piece.”

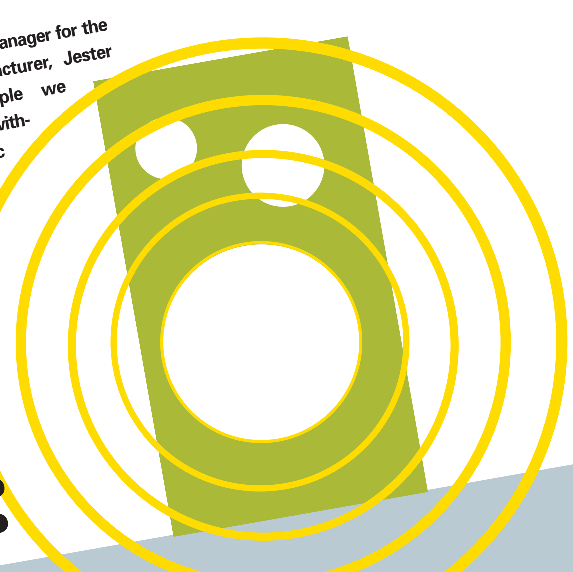
Others, however, like to play the game thoroughly, working closely with the designers in order to achieve the right result. “This way I can get a total understanding of the game's story, characters, atmosphere and so on,” explains Richard Jacques, a composer who has written

Going Solo

Music not only plays a role in games but has also created a genre in the form of bemani titles such as *Vib Ribbon*, *FreQuency* and *Parappa The Rapper*. In addition to this, music creation software is becoming ever more popular – particularly the *Music* series.

The latest edition, *Music 3000*, contains over 16,000 samples ranging across pop, metal, trance, garage and indie. In a new move for the series, a USB sampler and microphone is available which enables gamers to sample sounds from CD, vinyl, cassette, minidisc and their own voice.

Aside from giving gamers some scope to be creative, the results can also be more surprising. "We've had a couple of people go on to sign record deals after writing songs from our software, so there are no limitations," says Martin Kitney, PR manager for the software's manufacturer, Jester Interactive. "People we have shown it to within the music industry have all been impressed with it."



SOUNDING OFF

music for games such as *Jet Set Radio Future* and the award-winning *Headhunter*.

"I like to totally immerse myself in a project before beginning the composition phase, this way I am eating, sleeping and breathing a particular project before I have written a note of music." Allister Brimble, best known for his compositions during the Amiga era, also follows this approach of using the game as inspiration. "It does help a great deal to play the game first," he says. "I'm inspired by good games, which is why my Team 17 work turned out well. Sometimes just the idea behind the game, if it's strong, is enough to help me."

Of course, the type of game plays a huge part in determining the style of music to be composed. A bouncy little ditty would be useless in a horror scene; likewise, you wouldn't expect to hear blood-curdling screams providing the backing to a cutesy platformer. First-person shooters, horror titles and action adventure genres often broadcast a variety of different styles, with the biggest scope for interactive music changing to accommodate the player's actions. RPGs, on the other hand, tend to have the most orchestral of soundtracks like those of a film, with fixed music created to suit a particular scene or dialogue to progress character development.

"Creating music for a game is like finding an address," says Adam Levenson, who was assistant music supervisor/editor on *Enter The Matrix*. "We start with the biggest questions, like finding out what country is the address in, then work your way to the town, the street, and finally to the individual you're looking for.

"The big questions can be 'what kind of a game is this?' Is it a serious RPG, or a complex RTS pinning races against each other in an epic fight of good versus evil? Is it a high-action shooter, or an adventure game with a humorous slant? The platform is part of your address, as are any stylistic suggestions that come from the designer, developers and publisher."

Andy Brick, who has composed music for the US release of *Arc The Lad Collection* and used a live orchestra for *Sim City 4*, believes that "other games require simply background music to set a feel or an ambience. For example, the music in *Sim City 4* was all about the style. The nature of the game would make it virtually impossible to score to an actual picture so I set out to create a musical environment."

"It's important to emphasise that an orchestra will not make bad music sound any better, nor is it the only way to create decent music"

The Golden Era

When it comes to discussing music in games, it's hard not to refer back to the classic 8-bit period – in particular, the Commodore 64 and its famous SID chip. The MOS 6581 Sound Interface Device chip (aka SID) was groundbreaking for its time and was developed by Bob Yannes, who later went on to form synthesiser company Ensoniq.

"On the C64 you could only play three notes at once," says Allister Brimble. "This was tricky to work with, but what it did mean was that you had to produce much better compositions. One bad note would stand out and a poor melody could be picked up on immediately as you only had two other channels to back it up. Only the best musicians survived in those days, so you tended to get great music all round."

The chip's versatility meant it could imitate musical instruments accurately and plenty of composers made a living out of the format. One of these, Tim Follin (who created music to C64 games such as *Ghouls N Ghosts* and *Peter Pack Rat*) feels that the hardware limitations of the chip



were a positive thing. "Writing music for the Commodore 64 and Amiga was really about doing the best you could within the limitations," he says, "and the limitations were the inspiration. Back then, people had an intuitive sense of what the limitations were, so I think what they liked about game music was the pure innovation within the limitations, which meant you spent your time coming up with purely musical ideas."

Something that could never have been dreamed of at the time was the way that some games were bought just for the music. "It's crazy to think that used to happen," says Follin. "I think it proves that music then was as much about innovation and originality than the games themselves."

"I guess people don't buy games just for the music these days," adds Brimble, "because there are no limitations. The old 8-bit machines had a simple sound chip and you were amazed to hear how far they could be pushed."

While the Commodore 64 is now out of the public eye, its popularity is still strong, with numerous websites dedicated to the machine and its musical chip. The sheer number of sites on the web dedicated to SID files shows just how popular the music is even today.

Setting The Scene

Since the introduction of the PlayStation and other CD-based consoles, the trend towards an orchestra providing the soundtrack to a game is becoming ever more popular. For the composer, the benefits of using a live orchestra are quite extensive – it means that the music is no longer held back as much by hardware limitations and they get to concentrate far more on the musical side of things. It's important to emphasise, however, that an orchestra will not make bad music sound any better, nor is it the only way to create decent music. "More importantly, it's a technique, not a means to an end, the end being great game music," says Adam Levenson.

Primal's soundtrack was composed by studio outfit Bob & Barn after they were approached by Sony. For such an ambitious project, they had five

Musical Maestros

Allister Brimble
Responsible for music in over 230 titles, Brimble is best known for his early works for Team 17 including *Alienbreed* and *Project X*, and for recent titles including the *Driver* series. ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/allister_brimble/

Tim Follin
Beginning writing for the ZX Spectrum, Follin was responsible for the music in games such as *Bionic Commando*, *Ghouls N Ghosts* and *Ecco The Dolphin*. His most recent project is *Starsky & Hutch* and he's just finished work on a game for Zed Two provisionally called *Pillage*. www.timfollin.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk

Richard Jacques
After finishing his music degree, Jacques became an in-house composer for SEGA for titles such as *Jet Set Radio Future*, *Jet Set Radio*, *Sonic R*, *Metropolis Street Racer*, *Sonic 3D* and the award-winning *Headhunter*. He is currently scoring *Headhunter: Redemption*. www.richardjacques.com

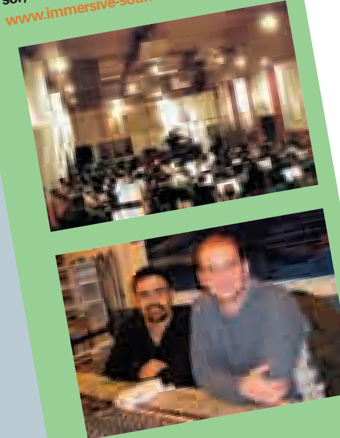
Jesper Kyd
His credits include *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*, *MDK2* and *Minority Report*. He is currently working on *McFarlane's Evil Prophecy* and *Freedom Fighters*. www.jesperkyd.com

Inon Zur
He has composed music for games *Run Like Hell*, *Icewind Dale II*, *Baldur's Gate II: Throne of Bhaal* and *SOCOM 2: US Navy SEALS*. www.inonzur.com

Andy Brick
He has contributed music for *Arc The Lad* on PS2 and is at work on music for a new *Sim City* game. www.andybrick.com

Andrew Barnabas
One half of studio Bob & Barn, the pair have collectively worked on *SWIV*, *Aladdin*, *Desert Strike*, *Pinball Dreams* and *Primal*. They are currently working on *Bionicle* and a game for Argonaut. www.bobandbarn.com

Adam Levenson
The audio director of Immersive Sound who was also assistant music supervisor/editor on *Enter The Matrix*. www.immersive-sound.com



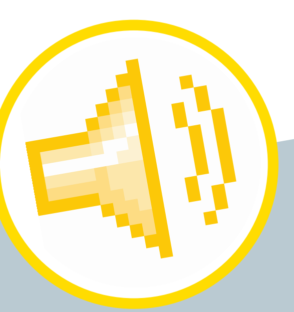
And the winner is…

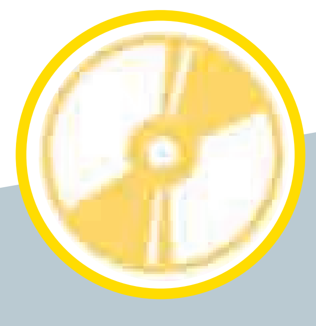
Game sountracks often receive accolades from within the industry – *Icewind Dale II* was nominated for 2002 Soundtrack of the Year Award by Game Industry News, The Game Audio Network Guild Awards nominated *Hitman 2* in four categories while *Headhunter* received the 2002 Game Audio Network Guild Recognition Award (among others).

But it is only recently that recognition of the format has become more prominent. In 2000, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) decided that game music could become eligible to win Grammy awards, although in order for a soundtrack to be considered, it has to be commercially available as a music CD or stored in Red Book audio format on the game CD-ROM.

As yet, a game hasn't been nominated as not enough composers are voting members of the NARAS, but the potential is clearly there should the industry decide to move in this direction.

SOUNDING OFF





weeks to create 95 per cent of the musical score which was to accompany the two and a half hours of cut-scenes in the game. In order for the process to go smoothly, they needed their own posse of specialists including a producer (James Fitzpatrick), orchestrator and conductor (Nic Raine), copyist, an engineer (Jan Holzner) and an editor (Gareth Williams), who creative director Andrew Barnabas admits are the "unsung heroes".

"With *Primal* we made fundamental leaps," says Barnabas. "We realised that consciously or subconsciously we write orchestral music to the strengths of the sounds we have available – for instance, good string samples means an emphasis on string writing, bad brass samples means ignoring the brass. This is a terrible way to write, since you're not taking full advantage of the instruments at your disposal. With an orchestra, you don't have any of those limitations and the results are way above what you can get with even the best samples available today."

Although the technology is there for orchestrated music and a handful of companies set aside the budget for game music, there are still numerous publishers who don't give music the attention it deserves. While deadlines have improved, the budget hasn't really moved on and the facilities aren't as advanced as they could be. "I started out imagining getting live musicians in for the whole thing and doing an authentic Seventies soundtrack," says Tim Follin of the soundtrack to *Starsky & Hutch*. "Initially, it looked like the producer was willing to up the budget just enough to make it work, but then the hassle of getting people in, having to pay them in advance and the need to hire a studio sort of kicked it all into touch again, so I ended up doing it all at home."

There's also the argument that for all the advances in technology and the use of real instruments, music just isn't as good as it used to be. "Today with CD-based music anyone can basically create music for games," says Jesper Kyd, composer of the *Hitman 2* soundtrack. "I think that today's videogame music is quite boring, predictable and generic. It's mostly about implementation and as long as the music fits, the effort toward creating something memorable and unique seems lost."

Licence To Thrill

The use of licensed or commercial music within a game isn't a new concept. LucasArt's *Loom* in 1990 featured sections of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* transposed into MIDI format – a first for classical music – and was successfully used to evoke emotion throughout important scenes of the villain trying to overpower the player. Michael Jackson's *Moonwalker* on the Mega Drive featured renditions of *Billie Jean* and *Beat It*, albeit in a synthesised form. However, the use of CD-based technology has seen an surge in the amount of licensed music in games, with *Wipeout* featuring artists such as Underworld, Future Sound Of London, The Prodigy and The Chemical Brothers, while extreme sports titles such as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4* have licensed tracks by The Offspring, AC/DC and the Sex Pistols. Yet while use of mainstream bands in games can make them more popular, it can have the reverse effect on the gameplay experience.

"Licensed tracks are fine for title tunes, but these artists often lack the skills to be able to conjure up a gaming atmosphere," suggests Allister Brimble. "Of course, that's because they're not game musicians and don't understand how music and gameplay should fit together."

Richard Jacques also feels that licensed music isn't always the right choice for a game. "There have been some games where the music has put me off the gaming experience," he says, "but these games normally feature a licensed soundtrack. In this instance, it is often a producer, designer or marketing executive who picks the licensed tracks, and despite trying to keep an open mind, their own personal preference of styles, bands, artists or DJs seems to have an impact on the licensed track listing. A well-executed soundtrack, be it licensed or original, can truly make or break a game."

"Inappropriate music can create the opposite effect that the designers intended," agrees

The Ultimate Resource

The Internet is a heaving mass of sites relating to game music, whether you're looking for SID files to play your favourite C64 pieces or MP3s of original themes that have been remixed and updated by fans. There are even websites created by the composers themselves, offering their files for download to anyone who fancies a trip down memory lane. It is here you'll also be able to buy soundtracks to your favourite games – whether it's *Wipeout, Halo, Final Fantasy, Parappa The Rapper* or an obscure Japanese release, chances are you'll find it lurking on the web somewhere.

www.c64.org	The C64.org portal
www.hvsc.c64.org	High Voltage SID Collection
www.c64audio.com	C64 audio files
www.vgmusic.com	The Videogames Music Archive
genres.mp3.com/music/electronic/game_soundtracks	MP3.com's game soundtrack charts
remix.overclocked.org/index.php	OverClocked ReMix – the Unofficial Game Music Arrangement Community
www.altpop.com/stc	Soundtrack Central
www.alpha-ii.com/snesmusic	SNES music
www.gamemusic.com	GameMusic.com (soundtrack sales)
gkworld.zoovy.com	GKWorld (soundtrack sales)
www.vgmidi.com	VGMidi (MIDI forum)

Andrew Barnabas. "Worse still, it can pull the player out of the 'world' that he or she is currently in and remind them that they are just playing a game."

Interactive Future

Of course, the thing that most developers should take into consideration is where game music can go from here. While there are many opinions on this, the majority of them suggest that making it truly interactive is the key, with the music matching what is happening in the game. Some games already manage to do this – Jacques, Follin, Barnabas and Brimble all cite the *Medal Of Honor* games as great examples of well-executed interactive music – but in many respects, the industry still has a way to go.

"True musical interactivity means never hearing the same thing twice," says Adam Levenson. "Our nemesis as audio content providers is repetition – this happens in games when we create content using linear production techniques, and then try to make it work in an interactive scenario."

When thinking about the future of music, Allister Brimble says that he'd like to see "soundcards with much higher specs fitted as standard to PCs, thus allowing an interactive MIDI track to sound as good as CD audio but with the flexibility that MIDI offers." In order to progress, though, it may be less about the technology and more about the live aspect of the music. "The interactive nature of games provides the opportunity to make the music an interactive experience," argues Andy Brick. "However, in order for us to achieve the next level in game music, I believe we must take a step away from technology and focus more on the live musicians and live orchestras."

It seems then that the future of music depends a great deal on producers embracing the technology that is available and treating it as an important element of the gameplay, rather than just a sideline. Other ways need to be found to not only create innovative music for the gamer, but also to make it more appealing. "I think that original game music is going to have to evolve into something unique and innovative and be recognised as such by the public," says Tim Follin, "or by the time business realises that the public would much rather have three original tracks by a known artist than thirty by someone they don't know, game music is going to get forced out of the frame."

Let's hope that never happens…

Live And Unplugged

In 2002, a concert was held at the Tokyo International Forum to celebrate the music from the *Final Fantasy* games, which was performed by a live orchestra. While game music performances such as this are a regular occurrence in Japan, and composers like Nobuo Uematsu (*Final Fantasy*) and Koji Kondo (*Legend Of Zelda*) command as much popularity as any pop star, such recognition for music in games in Europe is rare. However, this doesn't mean that there aren't such events to attend. Press Play On Tape (www.pressplayontape.com) are a tribute band dedicated to performing C64 music at live concerts which have already proven to be very successful. For the first time ever in August this year, Richard Jacques' *Headhunter* and *Headhunter: Redemption* musical scores will be performed by the Czech National Symphony Orchestra at Gewandhaus, Leipzig, alongside music from *Final Fantasy* and *Mafia* at the Games Convention (www.gamesconvention.de), the European equivalent of E3.

"True musical interactivity means never hearing the same thing twice"



Saddle up for a supersonic ride as the Extreme-G Racing Association invites you to take part in a little high-speed biking. Sound barriers? They're there to be broken…



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

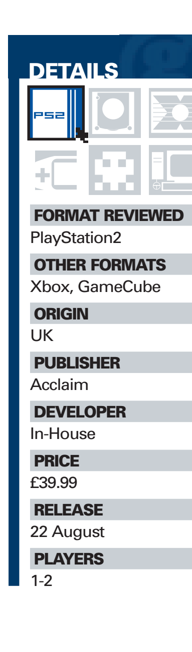
Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below seven (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know; if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.





XGRA: EXTREME-G RACING ASSOCIATION

PREPARE YOUR EYES FOR THEIR BIGGEST WORKOUT YET AS XG GOES SUPERSONIC AGAIN



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Acclaim

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
22 August

PLAYERS
1-2

Although we're awaiting the UK launch of *F-Zero AX* with bated breath, you don't need a violently tilting arcade cabinet to get a genuinely thrilling experience from the better examples of the futuristic racing genre. Hurtling around a gravity-defying racetrack at speeds in excess of the sound barrier remains one of the few gaming concepts with the power to tangibly affect players by subjecting our eyeballs to a virtual rollercoaster ride. While the *F-Zero* and *Wipeout* franchises have dominated the genre over the years with a rich history of rousing titles, Acclaim's *Extreme-G* series has managed to earn itself a similar reputation since making its debut in 1997. Initially dismissed by many as just another *Wipeout* wannabe, the impressive gameplay and blistering pace featured in the *XG* games has gradually established the series as a third serious contender in the extreme speed stakes.

As those familiar with the bracing delights of the three previous *XG* titles will know, players are placed at the helm of a futuristic racing bike and challenged with beating their opponents to the finish line by whatever means necessary. With *XGRA*, however, Acclaim not only takes the reflex-taxing experience itself to sensational new heights, but also aims to put some interesting meat onto the core gameplay bones with an in-depth Career mode and some engrossing rivalry dynamics. Riders entering the game's Career mode join the action at the outset of the 2080 racing season and will become immediately aware of how much effort has gone into bringing this fictional sport to life with incredible authenticity. The Sports Interactive News Network (SINN) commentary talks about the Extreme-G competition as though it really has been around for years, casually throwing in references to a thorough back history and politics that have evolved within the sport.

Established team rivalries and reputations are firmly in place, packaging the races in an impressively wholesome context. The dynamic competitive environment continues to develop in accordance with your actions on the track, and you'll soon discover any enemies you make during a race will be hungry for revenge the next time your paths cross. Riders with personal vendettas against you are helpfully highlighted and will frequently appear in the corner of your screen expressing their intentions to make you suffer. Inevitably, these comments soon become tediously cyclical, further fuelling your desire to eliminate any hostile opponents as quickly as possible.

FAQs

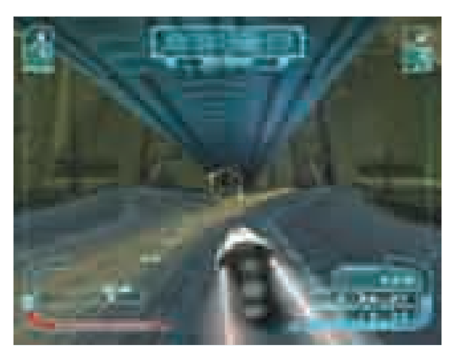
Q. ROCK OR DANCE?
You can speed along to either the uplifting rock or dance music soundtracks.

Q. HOW MANY TEAMS?
Eight in all – each with unique bike models, racing tactics and title aspirations.

Q. SICK BAGS AT THE READY?
The combination of crazy circuit design, relentless speed and powerful visual effects makes for a pretty intense ride.

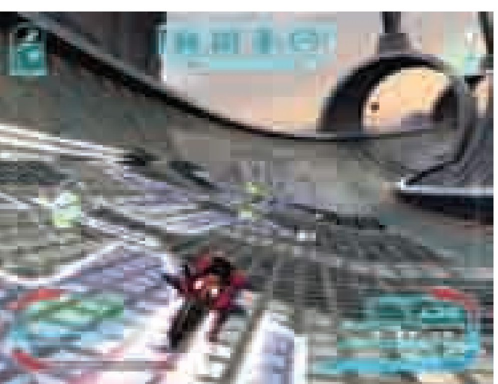


■ Hurtling round some of the circuits feels remarkably like a bobsleigh run.



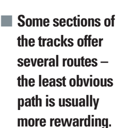
CIRCUIT BREAKERS

The action is brought to you live by SINN from a variety of locations around the globe and outer space. From the icy wastelands of Antarctica to the tropical jungles of South East Asia, the 16 insanely winding circuits are set against some diverse backdrops. While races staged deep beneath the ocean or within a space station are indoor affairs, courses that do expose riders to the elements can be subject to some challenging weather effects. Most circuits have also been designed to feature multi-branching pathways for players to explore and memorise the most effective route to the finish line. Victory ultimately tends to hinge on finding the route with the most boost strips, allowing players to make up ground on those riders taking the more obvious – and invariably least profitable – paths.



■ Controlling your bike around the twists and turns at electrifying speeds requires razor-sharp reactions.

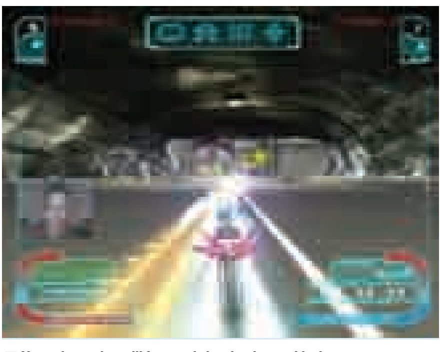




■ Some sections of the tracks offer several routes – the least obvious path is usually more rewarding.



■ As if keeping to the track wasn't tricky enough, there's also the small matter of your bitter rivals to worry about too.



■ Your adversaries will frequently bombard you with cheesy comments and threats – all the more reason to eliminate them.

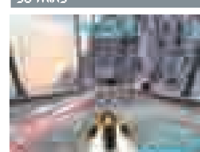


■ Your team will issue secondary objectives like destroying rivals' advertising banners, but don't forget to win the race as well…

TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

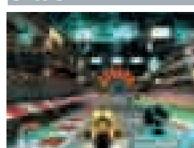
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM…

30 mins



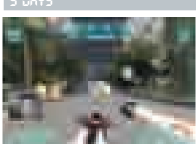
By now you should have blasted your way through the Invitation Class tournament, caught the eye of a few teams and made the crucial decision of which outfit to join.

3 HOURS



Having honed your reflexes to master the tricky handling and left the sub-sonic division far behind, it's probably time to give your exhausted eyeballs a well-earned rest.

5 DAYS



Hopefully you'll have unlocked most of the bikes, tracks and racing classes so you can share your favourite high-speed spectacles with your mates in multiplayer mode.



Secondary weapons advance with every orb you collect, from simple speed-ups to the devastating Deathstrike.



As you progress through each racing class you'll get increasingly speedy machines, but power is nothing without control.

You'll kick-start your career by entering an Invitation Class competition that gives rookie riders the opportunity to put themselves in the shop window for potential employers over the course of three preliminary races. Achieve a series of respectable finishing positions and you should find a good selection of racing teams eager to acquire your services for the coming season. Each team offers riders a unique approach to racing, featuring bike models with diverse combinations of handling, acceleration, speed, shielding and regeneration capabilities. Beginners may wish to join the ranks of a team whose bikes are particularly easy to handle and come protected with powerful shielding, whereas the more proficient rider may choose a team that focuses on pure speed or aggressive combat depending on your preferred style of play.

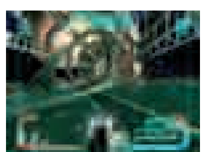
However you decide your career should progress, your ultimate aim is to accumulate the points necessary to progress through the various racing classes. The sub-sonic class of machines you'll initially be racing may seem fast enough, but earn the right to shift up a gear into the sonic class and you'll find yourself battling to control a vehicle capable of breaching the sound barrier. Master the art of taming these mechanical beasts and you'll be able to experience the utterly insane speeds of the supersonic, and eventually ultra-sonic, division. Along with the ongoing goal of reaching the chequered flag before anyone else, teams will also issue riders with a secondary objective to be completed during each race.

These 'contracts' will again vary depending on the team you're riding for, but can involve anything from finishing ahead of a certain opponent to attaining a specified top speed. Contracts become increasingly challenging as players move up through the classes and might eventually require you to assassinate every member of a rival team or destroy all their sponsor's advertising billboards. While you can choose to ignore the more complex objectives that might interfere with your racing strategy, their inclusion does add another level to gameplay once you've mastered the basics of navigating the circuits.

Acclaim has attempted to make combat more integral to *XGRA* than in previous versions by tweaking the targeting controls and adding the element of continuity to the rivalry system. Despite some noticeable improvement, however, combat still takes a definite rear seat to the slick racing action at the heart of the game. Though rumours on the gaming grapevine hinted at some of the excessive speed seen in earlier *XG* games being sacrificed to enable greater control over the use of weaponry, we're happy to report

"DRIVE IN THE SONIC CLASS AND YOU'LL FIND YOURSELF BATTLING TO CONTROL A VEHICLE CAPABLE OF BREACHING THE SOUND BARRIER"

XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW



As you'd expect, the Xbox version is slightly smoother aesthetically with a crisper feel to the visuals. There's little in the way of a worthy alternative on this console.

GAMECUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



F-Zero GX looks set to put *XGRA* up against some stiff competition with GameCube speed junkies, but for now there's little to match its fast-paced thrills on the Cube.



Races take place on some crazily designed courses against an imaginative variety of backdrops.



Hitting as many boost panels as possible while staying off the barriers is the only way to reach top speed.

MEET THE ROUGH RIDERS

Your bike comes equipped with a fixed primary weapon specific to the team you're riding for. Adding yet another element of variation to the distinct racing experiences each team offers, their preferred form of weaponry can be anything from rapid-firing lasers to rocket launchers. Reigning XGRA champions Team Starcom, for instance, are renowned for their violent tactics on the track and favour bikes with a particularly effective electricity-based weapon. Their focus on the more brutal side of XG racing, however, means Starcom riders are usually assigned combat-based – and essentially more taxing – contracts to undertake. Further to the primary weapon, players can also obtain a generic range of secondary weapons by collecting glowing orbs from around the circuit. Every orb gathered equips riders with increasingly valuable capabilities that include temporary invincibility and a devastating close-quarters rapier.



XG3: EXTREME G RACING



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



F-ZERO AX

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

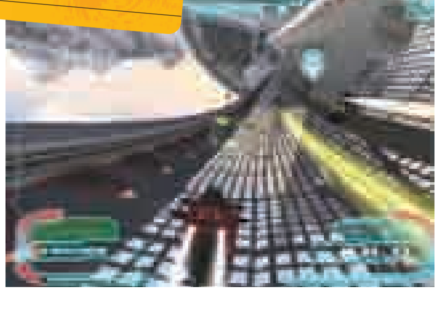
FEELING SUPERSONIC: Break the sound barrier and all goes silent as you wildly hurtle onwards.

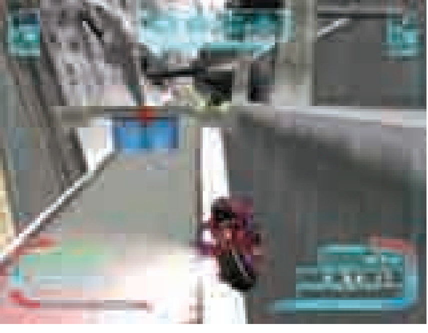
GRUDGE MATCH: Any opponents you upset won't forget you, creating ongoing rivalries.

no overall slowdown in proceedings. Whilst the rather tame sub-sonic division does offer beginners a little more scope for learning the ropes, the advanced racing classes show no signs of forfeiting the all-important sensation of speed and manage to feature some of the most exhilaratingly fast sequences we've ever seen in a videogame.

The 'pure racing' events players have the option of entering actually remove weaponry from the equation entirely and see riders focusing solely on the insane sprint to the finish. These contests clearly illustrate the game's foremost ability to deliver a breathtaking ride that will leave players feeling like they've just been through a tumble dryer. Track design plays a crucial role in creating the sensation, with all the twists, dips and loops you'd expect from the most intense of rollercoasters. The most thrilling sections of the circuits are carpeted with boost panels and hitting several of these in succession on a machine capable of breaking the sound barrier will send you supersonic, turning the scenery into a blur of light trails and leaving the sound of your purring engine somewhere down the road behind you. Controlling the bike under such extreme speeds with any fluidity can border on the impossible for inexperienced riders, and the reason you were subjected to learning your trade on the lowly sub-sonic machines quickly becomes evident.

The superb track design combines with a good amount of frame-rate ironing and some stunning visual effects to generate the mind-blowing speeds that make *XGRA* such an inarguably entertaining ride. Add to the gripping action an impressive amount of depth from the wholesome career dynamics and you're immersed in something much more than a detached series of single races. Though the combat still feels somewhat peripheral to the core racing action, the dialogue may be rather cheesy and controlling your bike under high speeds can demand some ridiculously sharpened reflexes, the sheer thrills and involving context should keep you engrossed long enough to unlock the post-sonic bikes and tracks needed to make the multiplayer arcade battles more than a little interesting.





Any riders you're contracted to dispose of will be helpfully highlighted.



VERDICT 8/10

A THRILLING RIDE IN WHOLESOME PACKAGING

VIEWTIFUL JOE

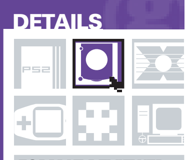
CAPCOM TAKES US TO THE MOVIES…

As home consoles continue to grow in processing power, the number of 'style over substance' games has increased exponentially. Developers have picked up on the fact that a decent graphics engine coupled with another strong feature (an established brand or movie licence, for instance) will shift units regardless of content, and a quick glance at current charts and sales figures suggests that this trend shows no sign of slowing. Mercifully, there are still firms looking to champion gameplay as well as focus on presentation; while they may be obvious examples, *Ico*, *Dark Cloud 2* and *Metroid Prime* all succeed due to the quality of their individual elements and the synergy thereof. Taking its inspiration from vintage movie culture, *Viewtiful Joe* is the latest 'wow' title for the GameCube – a console not without its fair share of stunning games, but thankfully, Joe isn't the vain type…

Before you even pick up the controller, *Viewtiful Joe* makes those all-important first impressions count. Taking its place among the best-looking games of this generation, the wonderfully crisp and vibrant visuals are rivalled only by the game's incredible animation. From an aesthetic standpoint, *Joe* does everything right – the superb score and effects perfectly complement the style and action-packed nature, and the voice acting (which is all in English in the main game) is also noteworthy. Mercifully, picking up the pad is not the first step towards disappointment and controlling Joe is every bit as simple and intuitive as it both appears and needs to be. Just watching the action, you'd be forgiven for thinking the frequent dodge moves and taunts were scripted events but once you get into the flow, you'll soon realise that everything Joe does is your doing, your idea or your fault. In terms of basic elements, this is near perfection.

Max Payne carried it off wonderfully, *Blinx* tried hard but ultimately failed and *Enter The Matrix* would have been a disgrace with or without it. We refer, of course, to time control – an element that plays much more of a part in *Viewtiful Joe* than you ever would have guessed at a glance. We'd have been happy just to see the little guy pirouette past projectiles in slow motion but, in reality, there's much more to it than that. From relatively simple uses like speeding up time to get more hits in to more ingenious applications, time control here is a well-integrated element as opposed to a flashy gimmick. Through some truly excellent implementation, altering the flow of time also forms the basis for many puzzles that far surpass what is expected of the genre. It has to be said that it isn't always clear which of your abilities to use, though, and some of these riddles aren't quite as intelligent as they make themselves out to be.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥11,400

RELEASE
Q4 '03
(Japan: Out Now)

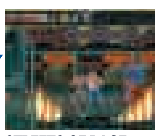
PLAYERS
1

P.N.03



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



STREETS OF RAGE

FAQs

Q. IS IT SHORT?
Only when you know what you're doing. Think in the region of ten hours on your first time through Adult mode.

Q. UNLOCKABLES?
Characters, modes and other such goodies are on offer for the more committed player.

Q. IMPORT FRIENDLY?
Remarkably so – voice acting is all in English, as are a lot of the menus.



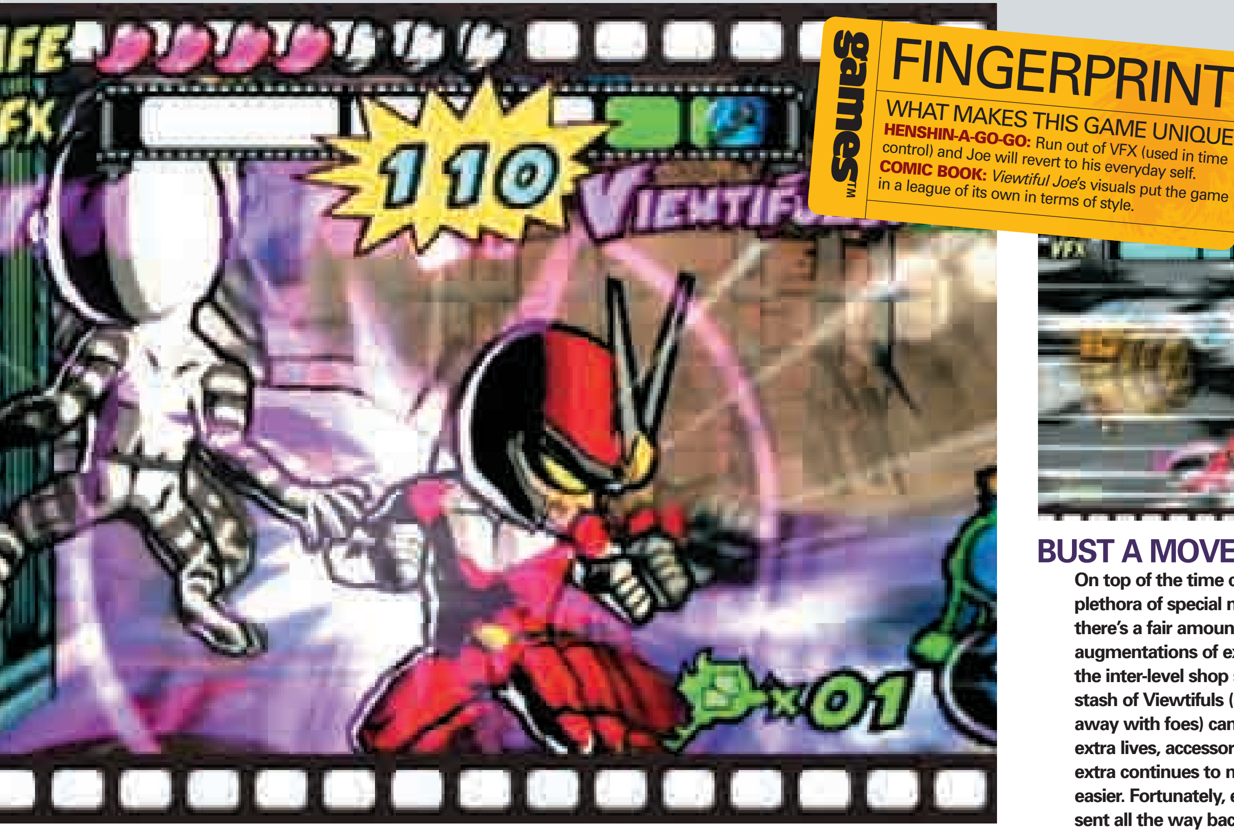
Most of Joe's special moves don't become available until further on into the game – for instance, this crazy spinning kick can only be used when you're using your Zoom ability. Obviously, it's rather powerful but can end up draining your VFX meter like there's no tomorrow…



Frantic – the one word that best describes how the action gets once you've managed to acquire all of Joe's special powers.



Slowing down time is crucial to your success – this water drop, for instance, will only grow big enough to hit the switch in slow-mo.



games™

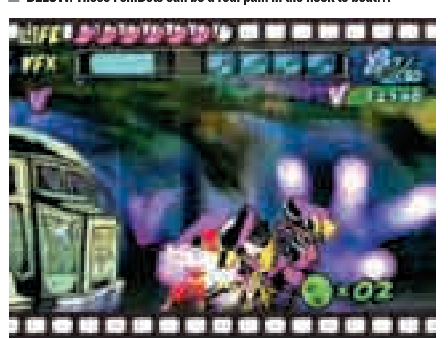
FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

HENSHIN-A-GO-GO: Run out of VFX (used in time control) and Joe will revert to his everyday self.

COMIC BOOK: *Viewtiful Joe's* visuals put the game in a league of its own in terms of style.

■ BELOW: These FemBots can be a real pain in the neck to beat…



■ BELOW: Yes, yes, enough posing. Isn't it time to move on, Joe?



And so begins the negativity, but fear not – this is far outweighed by the style and sheer playability of the game. We'd consider ourselves fairly accomplished gamers but we've got to admit that on more than one occasion, *Joe* had us beat. Even on Kids mode, later levels are strangely tough and considering there are settings beyond Adult mode (which itself got to the point of being plain frustrating towards the end), unlocking everything is a major commitment. Unlimited continues are all well and good but lose your allotted lives and it's back to the start of the stage for you, which can be one hell of a trek later in the game. Thankfully, the difficulty rarely strays into 'unfair' territory, although certain sections do manage to simply stop being fun altogether – the classic repetition of boss battles to add substance towards the end being a prime example.

Even with the somewhat erratic learning curve, it'd be downright irresponsible of us not to recommend *Viewtiful Joe*. In terms of pure style and showcasing what the GameCube can do, you won't find a better example than Capcom's latest offering, and so long as you've got the patience of a saint, the infrequent save points and forced repetition shouldn't grate too much. Unfortunately, we're all too aware that after being returned to the start of a level for the umpteenth time, the urge for even the most patient player to make a stylish lunge for the power button is an overwhelming one. Between bouts of sheer frustration, *Viewtiful Joe* is a deeply playable and highly enjoyable title that is verging on masterpiece status – it's just a real shame that the game's biggest (or arguably only) flaw is one that will prevent the majority of those that buy it from seeing much of what it has to offer.

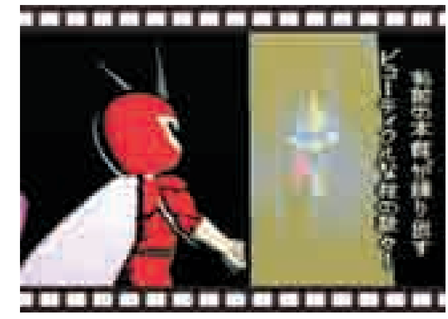


BUST A MOVE

On top of the time control abilities and plethora of special moves Joe can pull off, there's a fair amount of extra skills and augmentations of existing ones up for grabs in the inter-level shop sections. In addition, your stash of Viewtifuls (awarded for stylishly doing away with foes) can be spent on much-needed extra lives, accessories like the Voomerang or extra continues to make your life that little bit easier. Fortunately, even when you die and get sent all the way back to the beginning of a level, you'll keep whatever Viewtifuls you had – at least that way you can grab a few extra energy hearts or continues to help you past the tougher sections, most notably the boss encounters.



■ Getting three of the same symbol is the key to success here – although the machine's so small, you'll need the Zoom feature to see it.



■ Captain Blue pops up a lot early on to act as your mentor and teach you new moves. Plus he's also hidden away as a secret character…

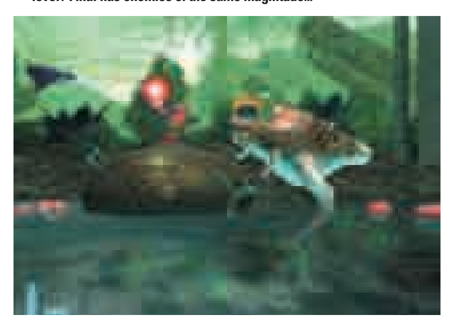


VERDICT 8/10

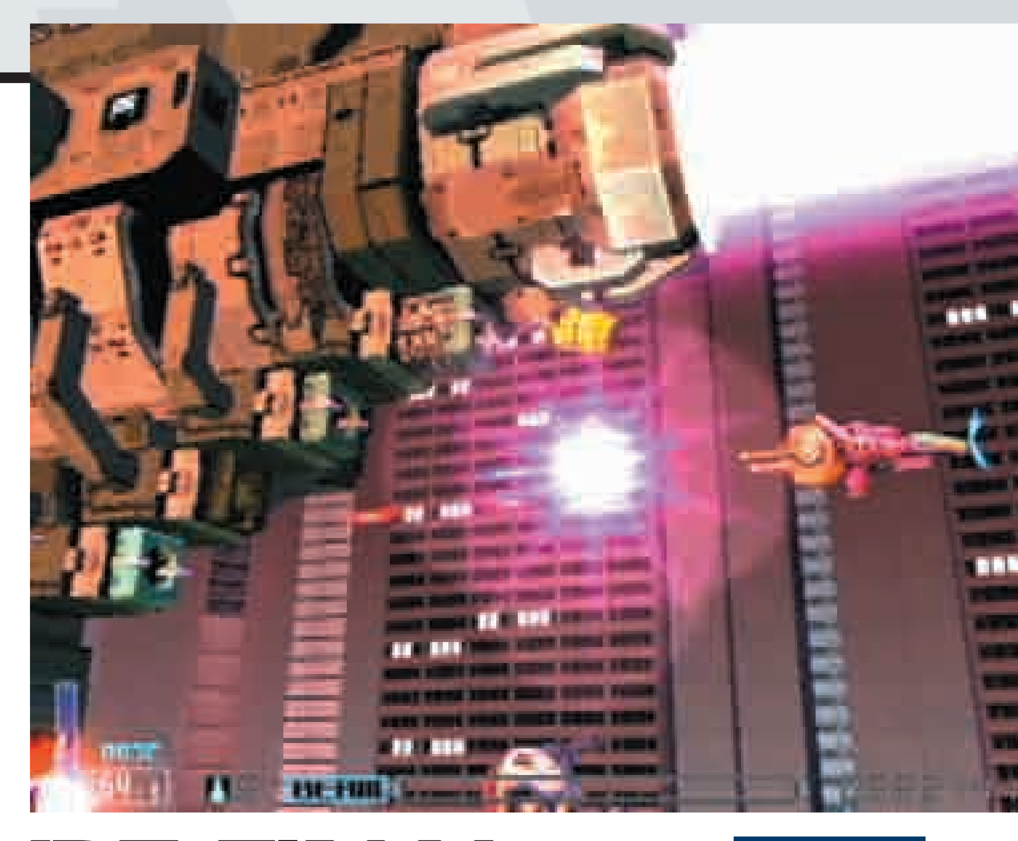
ROCK HARD BUT A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE



Remember the boss in *R-Type Delta* that pretty much took up an entire level? *Final* has enemies of the same magnitude...



The variety between levels (and even within levels, in some cases) is impressive for this style of game.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
IREM

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥5,800

RELEASE
TBC (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

SILPHEED THE LOST PLANET



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



R-TYPE (ARCADE)

R-TYPE FINAL

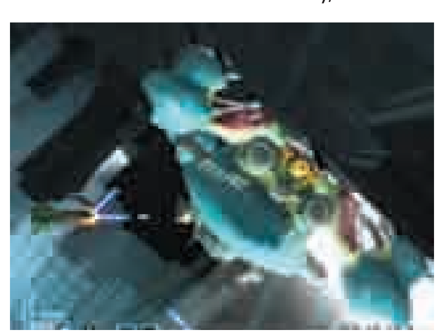
R-TYPE IS DEAD, LONG LIVE R-TYPE – BUT IS THIS A FITTING END TO THIS EPIC SERIES?

Agrimonia Pilosa, or Kinmizuhiki as it's more commonly known, is a rather special flower. Indigenous to Japan, it's iconic within Japanese culture as a symbol of gratitude. Since *R-Type Final* was announced, pictures of this flower have adorned practically all the game's publicity. The meaning? A farewell bouquet, wishing all *R-Type* fans a fond thank you for supporting the series so tirelessly. It's a grand gesture but now that the game is here can it really do justice to the rest of series to which it's paying homage?

The main bulk of the game is split into seven stages and over five difficulty levels. To play, ships are selected in the R's Museum section and then transferred to the Hangar, where they are customised before departure. Not only can the colour scheme of your ship be personalised but also its Missile and Bit load out – there are ten Missile types and 12 Bit types, with some only compatible with specific ships. Naturally, the Force power-up types (53 in total) also vary between each ship, as does the type of Wave Cannon (with a whopping 84 versions). Well, variety is the spice of life. There's also a lot of fan service in *R-Type Final*. The expansive R's Museum itself is probably the coolest example of IREM's desire to allow the fans a nostalgic nod of respect, but it's not the only part that raises the odd eyebrow. In addition to the museum, there's also a Bydo Lab and a section of CG artwork to be unlocked. Admittedly, these



The AI Versus mode is significantly different to the main game, but if you want your full quota of ships you'll need to get stuck in.



Talk about throwing you in at the deep end – this giant crab creature crops up to make your life hell after just a matter of minutes.

FAQs

Q. THE LAST EVER R-TYPE GAME?
A. As far as IREM is concerned, yes. Shame, eh?

Q. NINETY NINE PLAYABLE SHIPS?
A. Actually there are a hundred and one – the last two ships are secrets that need to be unlocked.

Q. PASSWORDS?
A. Both AI Versus and Score Attack modes produce passwords so you can enter your scores on the *R-Type Final* website. Some passwords can also unlock a few of the ships.

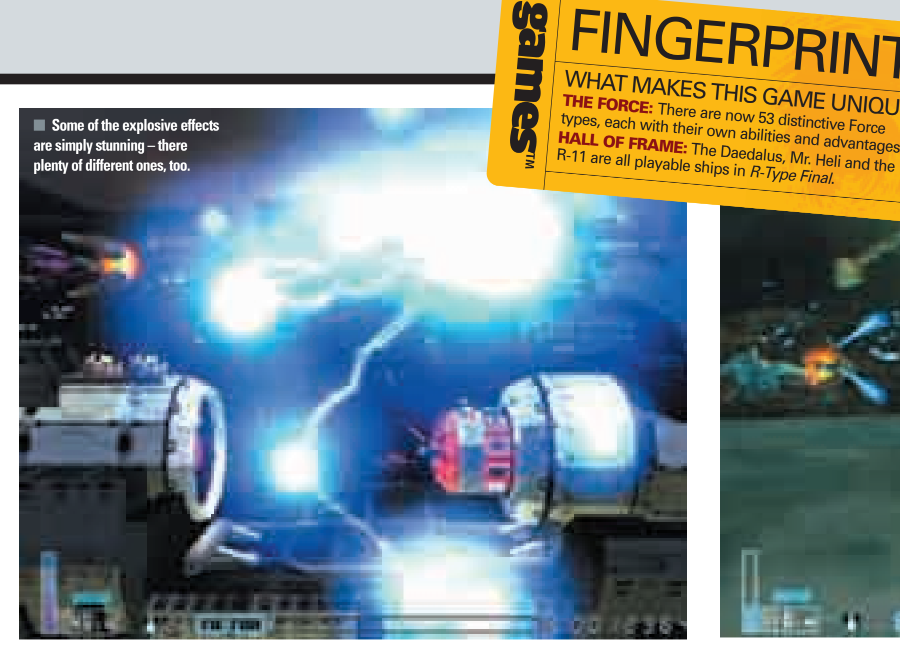
FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

THE FORCE: There are now 53 distinctive Force types, each with their own abilities and advantages.

HALL OF FRAME: The Daedalus, Mr. Heli and the R-11 are all playable ships in *R-Type Final.*



Some of the explosive effects are simply stunning – there plenty of different ones, too.



features were seen in the PlayStation releases of *R-Type* and *R-Type Delta,* but the sheer scope and polish in *R-Type Final* really does impress.

Of course, all this means naught if the game itself isn't much cop. While this certainly isn't the case here, we do feel slightly let down by the all-important level design. For instance, the first level hasn't changed since the trial version that was released a while back and still remains just as poor. Matters do improve somewhat during the remaining six stages, but the paths through the level are all pretty bland and lacking that spark of ingenuity that were integral to the previous entries in the *R-Type* canon.

Unfortunately, this is the main fault of *R-Type Final*; the level design is simply not up to the standard set by the other titles in the series – especially the original. *R-Type* was never just about navigating through swarms of enemies; it was a cerebral multitasking shooter, where the player not only had to negotiate cunning Bydo entities but also survive the environment. Sadly, *R-Type Final* lacks this tangible sense of its own environment – the game is a graphically polished and atmospheric shooter, but it lacks content to fill the levels. Despite this graphical void, there are also a fair few instances of slowdown – normally in sections where the game has to depict depth of view. Despite not being a huge disaster in terms of gameplay, this slowdown is still a disappointment and makes the game feel rather shoddy.

It could also be argued that the addition of over a hundred ships meant that the level design had to be standardised in order for all the ships to have an equal chance at survival, but this is not really the case. Whilst there are ships that lack the use of a Force power-up, they are not initially available. By the time the player has progressed far enough to unlock some of the quirkier ships, they will have already completed the game and most probably



Considering it's only the first boss, this shiny chap has quite an arsenal. And there's plenty more where that came from...

sampled all of the secret and alternate levels. The extra ships are meant to be hard to use and unlock – a challenge for the true *R-Type* aficionado. This is an admirable point of design and fitting for the closing opus of such a respected series, meaning that the level design falls short on its own content, and not due to other design variables.

Despite its many faults though, *R-Type Final* isn't an unmitigated disaster. The problem is that this is the last game in a series that has garnered a very high level of respect, so the expectations were naturally going to be very high. In this respect, IREM hasn't really failed per se, but it did set the bar unnervingly high. It's a solid shooter, and one that many people may enjoy, yet compared to its predecessors it does fall noticeably short. If you want to play a genuinely good shooter, then play the original *R-Type*, but if you want to take Mr. Heli for spin in a Bydo-infested universe, then *Final* may satiate your *R-Type* desires.

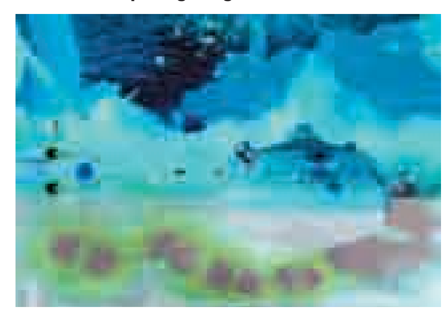


VERDICT 6/10

SOLID, BUT SOMEWHAT LACKING FOR THE FRANCHISE

ARE YOU RED OR BLUE?

Although the game only shows seven stages available in *R-Type Final,* there's actually an additional eight on top of this. Essentially alternate versions of each stage, these are accessed by shooting either a red or blue switch on some of the bosses. In some instances, this merely changes the environment conditions of a stage (as in Stage 2); however, the likes of the Stage 5 boss can alter the path of the game entirely, to the extent that there are three alternate endings depending on what colour switch you destroy (with some of these endings being particularly epic in an unspoken narrative sense). There's also a secret stage covering the demise of the R-13 Cerberos from *R-Type Delta,* but this can be only accessed after completing the game.



Fill the Dose gauge and you'll be able to unleash a huge attack which, for this craft at least, smacks of *Panzer Dragoon Orta.*



The Museum lets you examine, tweak and set your weapon collection for quick selection within the main game.



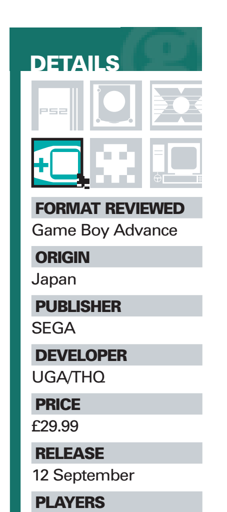
Boss battles make for some of the game's best moments, both in terms of technical achievements and actual gameplay.



The dance-off against Jaguar just isn't the same without having somebody shouting his name at you…



As much as we respect the effort that has gone into these rendered backdrops, they could never achieve anything like the original style.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
UGA/THQ

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
12 September

PLAYERS
1

LEFT, DOWN, RIGHT, UP, PORT, PORT, PORT…



SPACE CHANNEL 5: ULALA'S COSMIC ATTACK

Somewhat obviously, the rhythm action genre is not best suited to a handheld console. From the limited sound capabilities to a general lack of buttons (or at least an odd layout thereof), you can count on one hand the number of times it has been done successfully. Unfortunately, judging by this direct port of the Dreamcast classic, it doesn't look like you'll be needing that other hand any time soon…

You have to admire the ambition and confidence of the developer for even attempting this port. The rendered backdrops and animation may not be a patch on their predecessors, but when you sit back and consider the hardware running the game there really is very little that compares. Speech is also of a generally good standard (a few samples suffer from clarity and timing problems but it is a GBA game) but music is a different matter altogether, never even approaching the standards we know to be possible on the handheld and making some sections quite hard to play. In fact, some later parts of the game even fail to recognise the input of more complicated command sequences – a horrible flaw in a game of this type and one that really drags the whole package down.

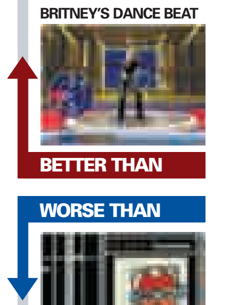
Much like *Crazy Taxi* and *Jet Set Radio*, *Space Channel 5*'s handheld update is more a victim of its own ambition than anything else but it does find itself in something of a quandary – fans of the games will already have played a superior version and newcomers probably won't even see just how much effort has gone into trying to make this work. Even sadder is the fact that there is a lot of fun to be had with the game but a few crucial flaws simply serve to frustrate and annoy until all semblance of enjoyment is gone.

Worse still, it's unbelievably hard to pin a score on *Ulala's Cosmic Attack*. In terms of technical achievement, this is nothing short of phenomenal in places, while in others you do have to wonder why something so obviously taxing was considered as a port. Of all the games to choose for a GBA conversion, picking one so heavily geared towards style, presentation and music does tread the fine line between stupid and clever and, rather frustratingly, falls mostly on the former. We want to love you, Ulala, but you're really not making it very easy …

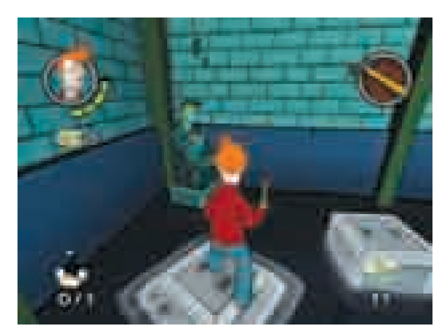
games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
PORT-A-LICIOUS: Unique? Hardly – this is a direct conversion of the DC original.
NOT AT HOME: Handheld music games have a history of failure, but try telling that to SEGA…

That's right, Ulala – groove *is* in the heart. Now hurry up and rescue that captain…





VERDICT 3/10
TECHNICALLY IMPRESSIVE BUT FUNDAMENTALLY FLAWED



Precise jumping is needed in much of the game, which is a real pain when the characters and camera seem to have minds of their own.



The loading interludes are funny in a good way, unlike the game.



They're better than the game engine, but the cut-scenes look pretty messy – couldn't new cartoon footage have been created instead?

FUTURAMA

YOU WANT A DECENT FUTURAMA GAME? BITE MY SHINY METAL ASS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SCi

DEVELOPER
UDS

PRICE
£39.99

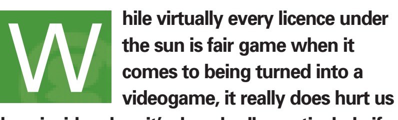
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



Unsurprisingly, the PS2 version looks a whole lot worse than the Xbox one – and considering it's not the nicest looking game on the Xbox, that's a pretty bad thing.



While virtually every licence under the sun is fair game when it comes to being turned into a videogame, it really does hurt us deep inside when it's done badly, particularly if it's one we hold dear to our hearts. In this case, it's the turn of SCi to play heretic and offer up *Futurama*, a game based on one of our favourite 'adult' cartoon shows (alongside *Family Guy* and *Dilbert*) that manages to defile everything that is good about the show itself in favour of generic platform action rubbish. Damn their eyes.

Thankfully though, there is in fact one single saving grace – the iron grip of Matt Groening himself. Having seen his precious *Simpsons* licence get flushed down the gaming toilet over and over again, it's not surprising that the creator of *Futurama* wanted to have more control over the content of the game this time around. As such, he ensured that the whole script was written by 'proper' *Futurama* writers as opposed to regular development types, along with getting the real actors to do the voices. This adds an air of authenticity to the whole thing, plus it's funny too; perhaps not quite as funny as the show but certainly enough to make you snigger on more than one occasion. This very sensible move on Mr Groening's part is one that saves the game to a very minor extent, or at least for all the time you're watching the cut-scenes. It's just a shame, however, that the same can't be said about the actual game – rather than being fun, it's just a combination of all the things that can go wrong in a platform game.

For starters the controls feel too clunky, the camera makes it impossible at times to see where you're supposed to be going and the cel-shading, while appropriate, looks quite nasty. Then there's the iffy weapons targeting system (which is pretty naff because you have to stand still to score accurate hits, leaving you open to attack), the repetitive collecting and switch-pulling that gets oh-so-boring, and the numerous instant death situations that are incredibly annoying, not least because dying means you have to do all the collecting and switch-pulling all over again. Need we go on? Probably not. It's just a typical example of another popular licence being wasted on a sub-par game – and no doubt it won't be the last.

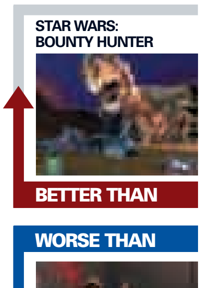
games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

CANDID CAMERA: For a game that requires precise jumping and aiming, the camera is rubbish.

DIE ALIEN SCUM: Lots of things in the game can kill you instantly – as you'll repeatedly find out.

STAR WARS: BOUNTY HUNTER



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



HUNTER: THE RECKONING

VERDICT 3/10

GREAT LICENCE, TERRIBLE GAME

CAST ASIDE YOUR MORALS AND DELVE INTO A WORLD OF POLITICAL INTRIGUE

REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos Interactive

DEVELOPER
Elixir Studios

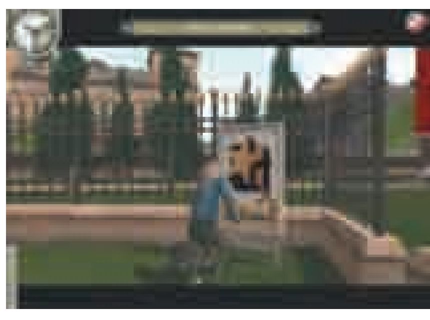
PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
800MHz processor; 256MB RAM, 1GB HDD space, 32MB 3D graphics card

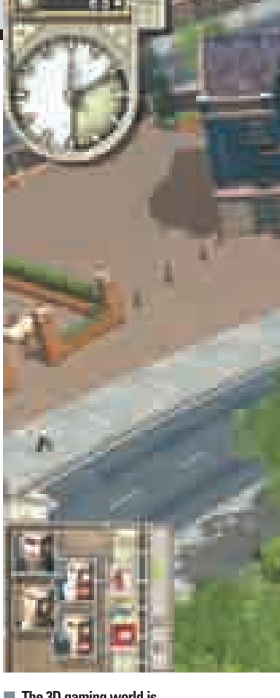




Take a former child genius who co-wrote *Theme Park* at the age of 17, add a generous pinch of lead programmer on *The Sims*, simmer for five years and you've got a recipe for potentially the most revolutionary project in gaming history. Yet after such a drawn-out period of hype – during which an inevitable number of corners have been trimmed to turn the ambitious original goals into a more realisable concept – will we be left staring down the barrel of one big disappointment? Or has Elixir's long-awaited debut really got what it takes to run for presidency of the strategy genre?

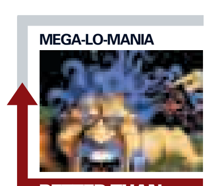
Following the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, one of the breakaway republics, Novistrana, has fallen into the grasp of a power-crazed dictator. Employing a sinister secret police force to swiftly deal with anyone who stands up to his oppressive rule, your only hope of ousting the president is to arduously build your own political faction from the ground up and win the support of the masses. This may sound like a pretty daunting task for the politically inexperienced, but *Republic*'s objective-driven path eases players into the murky world of political tactics by setting goals to gradually establish a strong base of operations. These objectives only loosely guide players on their way, leaving the choice of tactics you'll employ to gather support and diminish that of your opponents entirely at your discretion.

Before entering the action, your responses to a series of psychometric questions are analysed to determine your character's political ideology and personality attributes. Relationships between every party, person, district and political action in the game revolve around their ideological balance of Force, Influence and Wealth. Obviously those who share your basic ideology can be won over most



The 3D gaming world is largely peripheral to the main concept, but the dynamic city setting adds some atmospheric context to proceedings.

MEGA-LO-MANIA





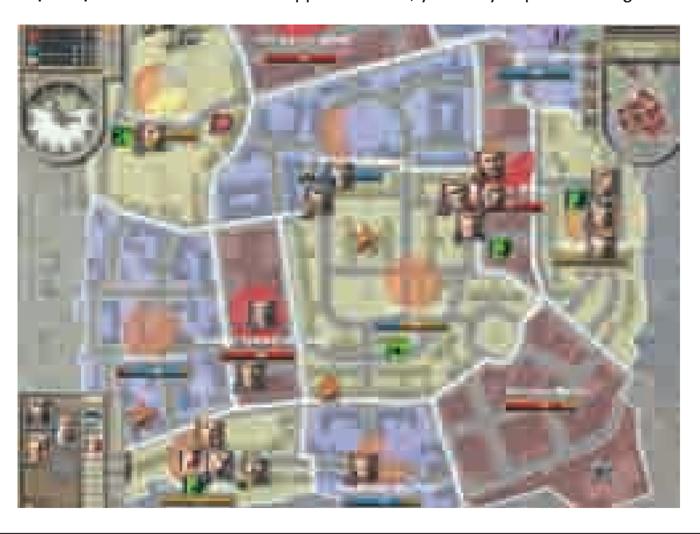
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

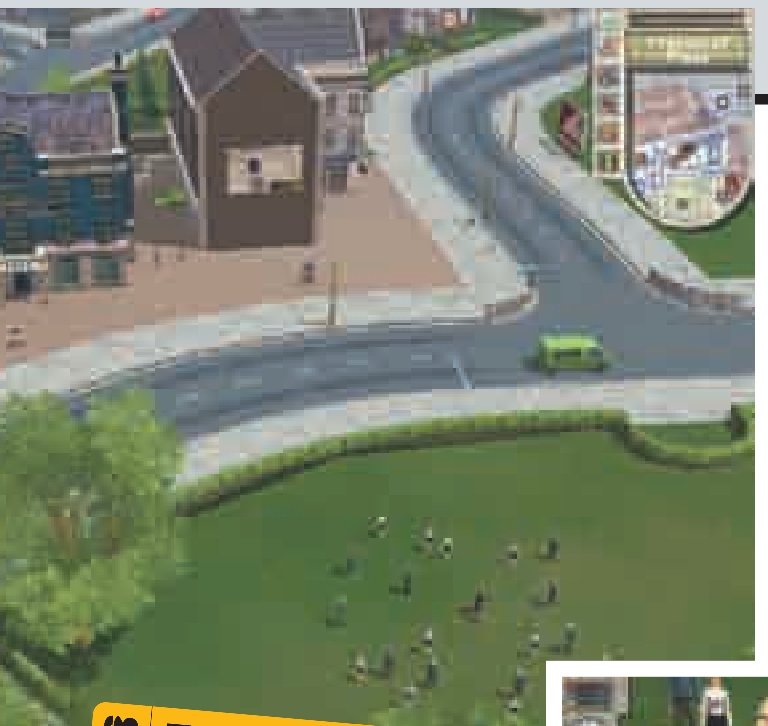


CIVILIZATION III

Here's where you'll spend the majority of your time strategically deploying your recruits and gauging the effects of activities on public opinion.







BATTLE OF WITS

While most of the actions you'll instigate are completely passive, activities such as enlisting the support of a new recruit allow you to influence the conversation through an entertaining mini-game. Long gone are the days of *Theme Park* where negotiations involved giving and taking enough to resolve the matter before the plate of Digestives ran out, yet the card-based system used in *Republic* follows a similar premise. Players distribute the points their character has available across four cards then play these blind against their opponent's hand, earning 5, 10, 15 then 20 points for each round won. This process is repeated now you're aware of the strong and weak cards your opponent has to play in the hope of improving your score second time around. End up with the highest score and the argument is yours.

FAQs

Q. HOW MANY CITIES?
Your rise to power begins in the small town of Ekaterine, before moving on to Pugachev and finally the capital itself, Berezina.

Q. CHANGE OF APPROACH?
Your faction's ideology will alter depending on the amount of forceful, influential or wealth-based tactics you employ.

Q. DANGEROUS BUSINESS?
You may have to relocate your recruits to keep them safe and even provide protection from assassination attempts.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

INFINITE POLYGONS: If you've got the hardware, you'll be dazzled by the Totality engine.

AVOID THE HEADLINES: Damaging lies in the paper? Send the boys round to 'have a word'…

easily, whilst actions that involve using muscle, influence or throwing cash around will enjoy different levels of success with people of different ideological stances.

Your first task will be to recruit a right-hand man, and as the game progresses up to four other members can fall under your wing once your party can accommodate them. The turn-based gameplay splits the day into three segments, and basically involves assigning each of your staff to perform a political action. Each recruit is capable of performing a range of upgradeable actions depending on their professional background. Anyone from criminals to religious leaders can offer valuable services to your cause, and the unique palette of followers you'll use to create your masterpiece campaign is entirely up to you. Initially you'll simply need to drum up the support of neutrals, but as other factions increase in popularity the political environment becomes a more complex arena of dirty tricks. Your opponents will stop at nothing to blacken your name in the papers or assault your recruits, so don't hesitate to employ similarly underhand tactics to your own ends.

The initially daunting interface does throw beginners in at the deep end, but orchestrating the actions of your troops around the political battlefield soon becomes surprisingly easy. The constantly ticking clock also shows no mercy as you get to grips with the game's premise, and keeps the pressure on as your role gets more demanding.



Strategically targeting the right people with the right actions at the right time and place brings all manner of intriguing considerations into play, yet rarely requires you to stray from the tactical map screen during a turn. However, with every move you make around this boardgame-style scenario the resulting action is played out in real time amongst the game's magnificent 3D city streets. Whilst *Republic*'s ambitious graphics engine and thousands of intelligent NPCs create an impressively atmospheric setting, you can't help but feel the technology is wasted as a peripheral feature depicting the pre-set range of political actions. Unless the activity involves dishing out a beating to one of your rivals, you'll generally be far too busy to observe the rather dull sight of your loyal servants handing out their leaflets or making a speech.

Though *Republic* delivers much of the open-ended freedom and strategic depth we'd hoped for, the overall experience somehow lacks the engrossing quality it promises. The 200 separate actions at your disposal keep things varied, but you're only really either gathering support, damaging your opponents' factions or attempting to weaken a rival member of your party. The intelligent tactical basis should certainly make this a massive hit with hard-core strategists, but the average gamer may struggle to be inspired by the map-based gameplay action and heavy subject matter.



One of your few chances to directly influence the actions you schedule are conversation mini-games where your persuasive powers are tested.



If legitimate political activities fail to deliver the desired results, you can spread rumours about opponents or intimidate their supporters.

VERDICT 7/10

NOT QUITE THE SUPER-POWER WE'D HOPED FOR

ENOUGH WITH THE BLOODY DOORS ALREADY, WHAT ABOUT THE GAME?

THE ITALIAN JOB: LA HEIST

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Climax

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
5 September
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

Not to be confused with SCi's Mini-driving romp inspired by the classic 1969 movie, Climax's latest bout of motoring madness is instead based on this summer's impending Hollywood remake. Replacing the customary Italian backdrop with the modern day streets of Los Angeles, the game's Story mode follows the exploits of Charlie Croker and his gang as they plot to steal back $28 million in gold bullion from the chap who double-crossed them in a previous heist.

Players can expect to be repeatedly tasked with racing frantically from one location to another within a specified time limit, occasionally throwing pursuing cops into the mix to provide a little variation. While the radar will helpfully indicate the general direction of your objective, how you get there is left to your discretion. In fact, your ability to find the quickest route through the maze of city streets and abundant short-cut opportunities has a far greater bearing on your success than the standard of your driving skills.

You'll find yourself behind the wheel of various vehicles as the story progresses, but it's the super-charged Mini Coopers that provide the most entertaining ride. Particularly well suited for carving out those unlikely short-cuts off the beaten track, the ability of these nippy machines to navigate those areas other cars can't reach is at the heart of Croker's plan. All vehicles in the game handle fluently and the smooth frame rate makes for some satisfying high-speed action. Crisp textures and some nicely detailed environments lend proceedings a reasonably high quality appearance, but the absence of pedestrians does make the city streets rather lifeless.

Sadly, the action is incredibly repetitive and frequently retreads the same areas. Each of the game's 15 missions typically contain three or four A-to-B drives and, aside from having to replay the entire level every time you fail the final mission objective, the whole thing can be ploughed through in a ridiculously short time. A few racing circuits and obstacle courses can be unlocked outside the short-lived Story mode, but fail to offer anything original. So many mission-based driving games have presented the tired concept with far more depth and variety than this, and without the movie licence such a straightforward addition to the genre is unlikely to have seen the light of day.

VERDICT 4/10
A SHORT AND BASIC BURST OF FUN





Though the 'Cube version is much the same, Xbox gamers will enjoy the usual crisper visuals. But against *Midtown Madness 3*, the Xbox version needs to try that bit harder.

STARSKY & HUTCH

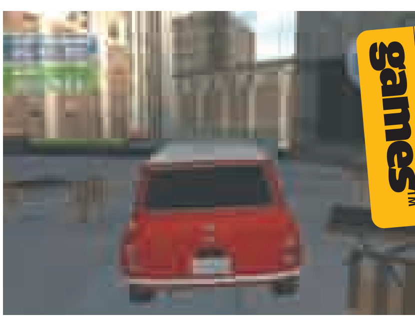


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MIDTOWN MADNESS 3



Sadly, you won't be able to cause half the theatrical motoring mayhem we'd have liked, and without a single pedestrian in sight…

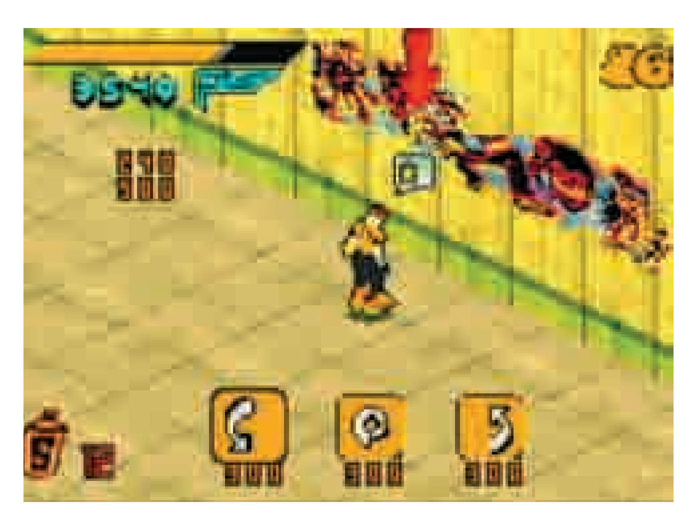
FINGERPRINT
games™
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
DRIVE CAREFULLY: Avoid car damage to earn a high mission rating in order to unlock new vehicles.
TAKE THE TUBE: Drive around the city's Metro and storm drain systems as seen in the film.



You'll have to drive a selection of vehicles, but the Mini's the best.



Although Charlie Croker features in the game, don't expect this to have many similarities to the original film – this is remake territory only.



As in the original, you'll have to input the right commands on the D-pad to spray your tags.





After claiming back your turf, you'll get the chance to tag the invading gang and get rid of them for good.

JET SET RADIO

SEGA GIVES GBA OWNERS THE CHANCE TO PAINT THE TOWN RED

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

TAG, YOU'RE IT: Link up your GBA to up to three others with *JSR* and you can try various multiplayer modes – these include fighting for control of areas with tags, a basic trick score contest and speed races.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
Vicarious Visions

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
TBA (US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

CRAZY TAXI: CATCH A RIDE

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



VIRTUA TENNIS

Although SEGA must have had a good reason for bringing the majority of its post-Dreamcast franchises to the GBA, it hasn't had a hundred per cent success rate so far in terms of quality. While some conversions have been more competent than we expected – such as *Space Channel 5* and, to a lesser extent, *Virtua Tennis* – it only takes one awful game (in this case, *Crazy Taxi: Catch A Ride*) to bring the whole house of cards down. Thankfully, SEGA has continued regardless and now presents its most ambitious console-to-handheld conversion yet – a game that, while not perfect, goes some way to making us forget how bad its last effort really was.

Of course, much of the vigorous back-slapping should really go to Vicarious Visions – the same developer behind the GBA's other top skating titles, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3* and *4*. Having already seen them bring the console versions of both games to the GBA with great success (not only for the game quality, but also in how closely the handheld game mirrored the 'grown-up' version), it shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that it's done the same thing with the Dreamcast release of *Jet Set Radio*. While the isometric viewpoint may make it difficult to tell, even the most cynical gamer should be impressed by the fact that the characters and levels in the GBA version of *Jet Set Radio* replicate those of the Dreamcast game almost perfectly – right down to the extra stages that were added for the PAL release. True, there are subtle differences in places but anyone who's experienced the original game should recognise the different stages almost immediately.

However, it's this careful replication that also creates the game's main flaw. Because the original game had a third-person viewpoint, it was possible to have areas that stretched high into the sky. When shown from the isometric view in the GBA game, the perspective makes it hard to judge angles and distances on occasion, meaning you'll find yourself hitting the Retry option more often than you should. Sadly, the rather twitchy controls don't help matters either, forcing you to persevere through, rather than enjoy, the game. It's a shame, because what's there (from animation and music to overall gameplay) is actually quite impressive. It just seems SEGA has tried to bite off more than it can chew.



VERDICT 6/10

ENJOYABLE, IF A LITTLE TOO AMBITIOUS

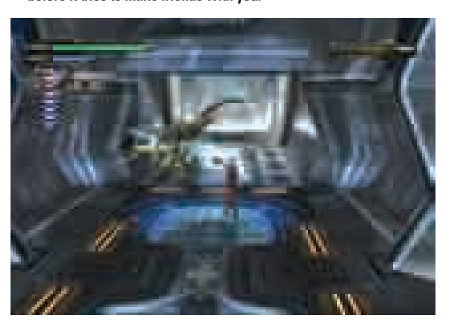
The more you spray, the more attention you'll attract – from basic police and SWAT teams to massive tanks and helicopters. It can get a bit hairy out there…







Don't look into its eyes, and whatever you do make sure you kill it before it tries to make friends with you.



DINO CRISIS 3

CAPCOM'S XBOX EXCLUSIVE DESERVES TO BE LEFT FLOATING IN SPACE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

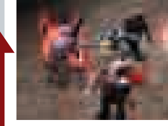
DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥6,800

RELEASE
September '03
(Japan/US: Out Now)

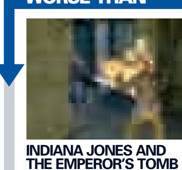
PLAYERS
1

HUNTER: THE RECKONING



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



INDIANA JONES AND THE EMPEROR'S TOMB

Games are undoubtedly evolving; edging ever closer to the eventual goal of a complete union with the Hollywood film industry. In a number of ways though, *Dino Crisis 3* is a shining example of how badly some games wish they were films. The hype has surrounded its release like a thick fog, and the people at Microsoft have been all too keen to drop in the fact that the great PlayStation survival horror series is set to continue exclusively on the Xbox. Sadly, Microsoft should prepare to wipe the smile from its face…

Dino Crisis 3 has all the right ingredients for a fantastic game, and the fact that it is indeed Xbox exclusive should have ensured that the developers could make full use of the console's power without worrying about how they may have to tone it down for a PS2 release. However, as the title suggests, somewhere along the line there was a crisis. As the undoubtedly stunning opening movie draws to a close (leaving the player faced with myriad Dino Worms, capable of toppling a rampant T-Rex no less), your appetite should have been well and truly whetted. Then the game's main problem raises its ugly head in the form of what could be described as the worst decision in the console's short history. Rule number one of free-roaming third-person action games such as *Brute Force* and *Max Payne* is that the camera should follow the player like a loyal hound; unfortunately, the camera in *Dino Crisis 3* doesn't.

Perhaps a seemingly petty issue, it becomes apparent that as you progress (by completing complex platform jumping and endless switch-



Kill as many of those dinos as you can, as points mean prizes…



…So you can buy upgrades and weapons courtesy of your butchery.

FAQs

Q. WORTH IMPORTING?
Not a chance. It's difficult to progress beyond the first quarter of the game, considering all the puzzles are in Japanese.

Q. FIXED CAMERA?
There have been rumours that the evil camera that causes many of the game's problems will be sorted out for the PAL release. But don't count on it.

Q. SPACE DINOS?
Well, technically, the creatures on board the Ozymandius are not real dinosaurs. Let's face it though, they are much scarier…



■ You hit the wrong end. Try again before it gets *really* angry.

JETPACK PATRICK

One of the game's most important features is the use of a jetpack within the 3D environments. Allowing the main player, Patrick, to jump higher, float and strafe effectively, the jetpack takes on several roles during the action. Avoiding the jaws of an electrified raptor-type creature is one use, but simply gliding down the corridors of the massive Ozymandius is itself a real bonus, as walking from point to point can seem like an eternity. Although probably just an excuse to turn the game into a glorified platformer after the developers failed to concoct any groundbreaking gameplay innovations, the jetpack seems to suit *Dino Crisis 3* to the core. It's just a shame about some of the more basic elements of this unfortunately sub-standard title.

■ The survival horror element of the game is rubber stamped by the annihilation of your ship. You're on your own now…

games™ **ENHANCED**

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

FLIPPIN' MARVELLOUS VIDEO: The cut-scenes are spectacular. Better than the game, in fact…

ON REFLECTION: The surface reflection makes *Dino Crisis 3* the greatest of the dino-capping trilogy.



■ Certain sections of the game will require you to play as token girly Sonia, separated from Patrick at the start of the game.

finding, random-stuff-collecting puzzles), the camera becomes a game-ruining feature. If trying to jump onto a platform you can't actually see is frustrating, wait until you reach some of the harder dino encounters; going on the offensive with the much touted jetpack is pointless if you're not exactly sure what's attacking you. Thankfully, it appears that the dinosaurs (which are actually not dinosaurs, but a very close relation. In space. Thousands of years in the future.) bring their stereos with them, as every encounter in the game is marked by a sudden surge in the same piece of overly dramatic background music. Is this how Capcom hoped to compensate for the diabolical camera?

Although the music enters the realm of absurdity, the game's visuals are above average. In fact, fantastic graphics and bog-standard gameplay is, in many cases, exactly what the phrase 'Xbox exclusive' means. The Ozymandius' shimmering surfaces make *Dino Crisis 3* look like the triple-A title it's meant to be, even if most of the rooms quickly begin to look the same. The odd piece of shoddy clipping here and there can also be excused, especially as the camera probably won't show you the action anyway. The cut-scenes are probably the best on any of the current consoles, as they could almost have been lifted from a top CG movie such as *Final Fantasy*, with the plot itself mirroring the sci-fi thriller *Event Horizon*, while perhaps giving a swift nod to the *Alien* films too. There is definitely no problem as far as the gaming story is concerned, and the twists and turns, although frighteningly predictable, should keep you glued to the screen.

However, for every silver lining there is always a cloud, and the mesmerising backgrounds and slick animations are quickly masked by schoolboy errors such as tacky respawning and the way in which the dead dinos simply melt into the floor. In fact, not since *Turok Evolution* has the Xbox suffered from such lazy, cheap-looking enemy fade-away problems (yes, it does still come with a hard drive that could avoid these poor touches). Frustration is the word that comes closest, but it by no means sums up the game. In short, *Dino Crisis 3* is a missed opportunity; a chance for the Xbox to claim another top franchise to ensure its survival. But endlessly wandering around samey rooms, looking for items hidden from view by the soul-destroying camera just drags this title deeper into the realms of complete infuriation. Such a shame, as the movies and terrifying boss dinos are almost the game's saving graces.





VERDICT 4/10

A HIGHER SCORE IS OBSCURED BY THE TERRIBLE CAMERA





FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

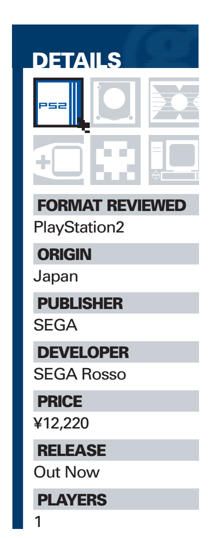
ONLY A GAME: Unrealistic handling is at the heart of the game's exhilarating ride.

WHO NEEDS FRIENDS: No multiplayer option is strange for a racing game, but *Initial D* pulls it off.

PLENTY OF LONG AND WINDING ROADS, BUT NOT A BEETLE IN SIGHT…

INITIAL D: SPECIAL STAGE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
SEGA Rosso

PRICE
¥12,220

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

As more and more racing titles pride themselves on taking the virtual driving experience to greater levels of realism than ever before, the further behind we appear to be leaving those fundamental elements that make traditional arcade racers such good fun. Refreshingly, *Initial D* has all the high-speed, reflex-testing hallmarks of your coin-op classics without any hint of realistic vehicle handling to slow the action down.

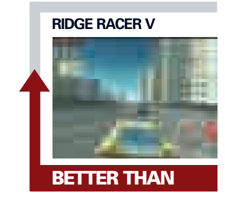
Based on the hugely popular Manga saga about a talented teenage road racer, the arcade version became a gaming phenomenon in Japan. A strong storyline runs throughout the home console version but unless you've encountered the adventures of Takumi Fujiwara and his friends before, chances are the well-loved characters and their vehicles will be immaterial to most UK gamers. Similarly, unless your Japanese is fluent, you'll also have to make do with only a gist of the game's Story mode. Recreating events from the Manga legend, the first mission sees our hero taking care not to spill a cup of water as he learns to drift smoothly around those snaking corners in preparation for the various racing duels ahead.

Arcade mode, however, forms the crux of the game and pits players against a range of opponents in a series of one-on-one challenges. The good selection of tracks varies from the undemanding to the ridiculously winding and each features a group of progressively testing adversaries. Story and race scenarios aside, for us this game is all about the thrill of the ride. Gameplay is simplistic, yet immensely entertaining and addictive. The drift-based cornering requires only momentary lapses in acceleration, whilst the overall blistering pace and twisting roads will keep your reactions on a knife-edge.

Yet those who don't fall in love with the unsophisticated handling may find little else to like about *Initial D*. Mediocre visuals, a potentially nauseating Tokyopop soundtrack, the bewildering absence of a multiplayer mode and a hefty import price tag will inevitably do little to appease the game's critics. But for a compelling slice of old-school racing action, those with the hardware may well consider splashing out.

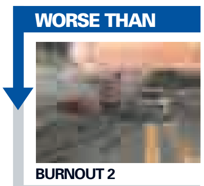
VERDICT 6/10
SIMPLISTIC YET COMPELLING FAST-PACED FUN

RIDGE RACER V

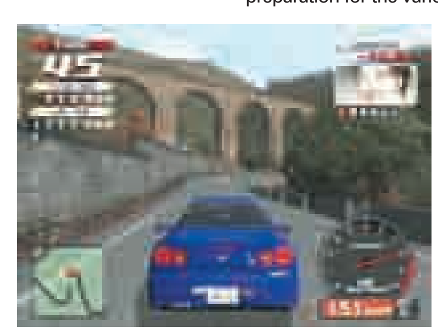


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



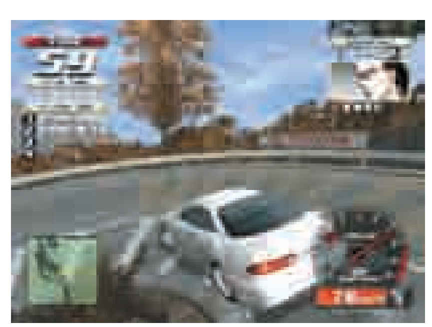
BURNOUT 2



Mastering the art of drifting round those corners is essential.



Control is easy, making the gameplay even more addictive.



The winding roads will be a rigorous test of your reflexes.

IT TAKES MORE THAN JUST SPRINTING AND RINGS, Y'KNOW…

SONIC PINBALL PARTY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SEGA

DEVELOPER
Sonic Team

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Q3 (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

Never one to be outdone, Sonic has obviously seen Mario's karting, tennis, golfing and such and decided to try and keep up. He's partied, driven, raced and spun with the best of them, now turning his attention back to a pastime he hasn't been too fond of since the 16-bit era – pinball. This time around though, he's gone for a more traditional re-creation of the game and he's not playing alone – SEGA has taken the liberty of recreating several of its other franchises for the silver ball too.

Pinball Party is broken down into three separate 'machines' (only two of which are available at first) based around a trio of classic SEGA games – *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *NiGHTS* and *Samba De Amigo*. These tables are faithful to the original games and will see you trouncing Eggman, performing acrobatics and getting down with your bad self all from the comfort of two flipper buttons. This is one of the game's best features – each of the three tables is lavishly crafted and surprisingly different from the others, meaning you'll find yourself switching between them fairly often.

Also impressive is the number of modes on offer, from Story mode (basically a series of increasingly tricky missions) to the ring-guzzling Casinopolis mini-games and a virtual life section – yes, Tiny Chao Garden is back and it's as limited as ever. We can, however, safely say that the two initial tables contain plenty to do and the only reason the third (the *Samba De Amigo* playfield) is any different is because of the way it works, offering a multitude of playable tunes depending on which bumpers you hit last.

Unfortunately, as good as the game is, the lack of tables is a prime weakness. The game tries to convince you that there's more on the cart than there really is – as you make progress on a table you'll reach 'new areas' which turn out to be nothing more than the same table with a fresh lick of paint. With only three playfields, extensive play is unlikely even though there are a few diversions to keep you entertained – these are mostly just ways to earn Rings for your Chao than they are interesting in their own right, although the three multiplayer party games (which are multi-pak only, unfortunately) fare notably better. If there were a little more meat on this, we'd be looking at one of the best pinball games around, but as it stands, we can't help but want more.

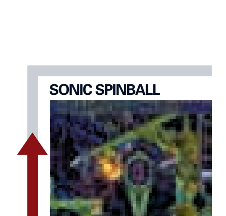


Despite the name, *Sonic Pinball Party* also has *NiGHTS* and *Samba De Amigo* tables.

FINGERPRINT
games™
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
POSE: The *Samba De Amigo* table actually features a miniaturised version of the maraca-shaking classic
GAMBLE: Thrill-seekers can fritter their hard-earned Rings away in the Casinopolis games.

VERDICT 7/10
VERY ENJOYABLE BUT LACKS SUBSTANCE

SONIC SPINBALL





BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



PINBALL OF THE DEAD



Just like a full-size console table, there are plenty of bonuses and secret areas to unlock.



The Casinopolis mini-games are an entertaining distraction from the business of serious pinball…



DETAILS

Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter

FORMAT:	PS2
ORIGIN:	Japan
PUBLISHER:	Capcom
DEVELOPER:	In-House
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	Q4 '03
PLAYERS:	1

Unlimited SaGa

FORMAT:	PS2
ORIGIN:	Japan
PUBLISHER:	Square Enix
DEVELOPER:	In-House
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	Out Now
PLAYERS:	1

Xenosaga Episode 1: Der Wille zur Macht

FORMAT:	PS2
Origin:	Japan
PUBLISHER:	Namco
DEVELOPER:	In-House
PRICE:	£39.99
RELEASE:	TBC
PLAYERS:	1

GROUP TEST

NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

What makes a game an RPG? Statistics? Dragons and goblins? A spiky-haired lead character perhaps? In truth, it's impossible to pin down just what categorises a game as 'role play' – the term is applied to a more varied selection of titles with each gaming generation. But it's this diversity that makes the genre such a joy, as is wonderfully proved by these three choice cuts. We've battled, adventured and trekked until weary in an attempt to ascertain which of this latest batch of role-players from respected developers can be deemed superlative. Each has made waves previously with PSone predecessors but which can claim 128-bit supremacy? **games™** adopts the position and kicks back for several hundred hours to find out…

THE PLAYSTATION2 IS CERTAINLY THE PLACE TO BE FOR RPG FANS, BUT WHICH OF THIS LATEST BATCH WILL LEVEL UP AND WHICH WILL FALL IN BATTLE?

AESTHETICS You'll be seeing a fair bit of them, so how do they look?

Breath Of Fire

Cel-shading, eh? It's everywhere. But looking at *Breath Of Fire*, it's plain to see why – when properly used, it can really make a title stand out. Settings look superb and while some aspects of the characters (most notably faces and clipping) are a little disappointing, lighting and other areas make up for it. Music is similarly varied but although much of the score is spot-on, there's too much repetition of samples in battles sequences.

Unlimited SaGa

Unlimited SaGa is very high-res, very beautiful and very distinctive – all in 2D. Unfortunately, while the static sprites and backdrops are excellent, animation is another story entirely. There are simply far too few frames holding the many actions together and when the characters look so good when still, the ropey movement looks even worse. On the plus side, the music and cut-scenes are of the high standard we've come to expect from Square.

Xenosaga Episode 1

We have a winner. *Xenosaga* is one of the most beautiful games we've seen – from the superb character models to some jaw-dropping effects. The only gripes are that a few battle effects and some enemy designs are less than stunning and some areas do suffer a little edginess, but that's nothing major. Audio is equally impressive and the score complements the action beautifully, leaving only a few lines of voice acting to let the sonic side down.

STORY Engrossing plot twists or rehashed nonsense?

Breath Of Fire

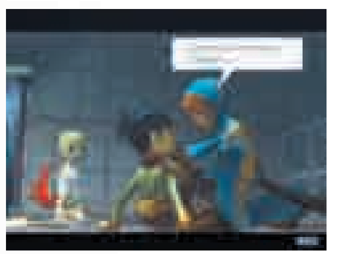
Dragon Quarter depicts a sinister future where man must live underground and young Ryu is tangled in a web of intrigue. Thanks to the unique Scenario Overlay system, certain aspects of the plot aren't addressed until a second playthrough, allowing repeat plays to fully explain what goes on. Obviously, not everyone will want to go through twice just to learn more but we have to commend Capcom's decision to try something new.

Unlimited SaGa

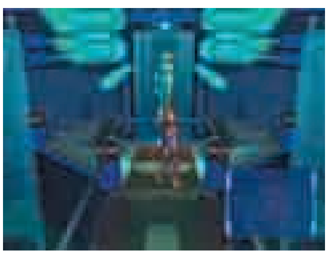
While most RPGs have some huge ultimate task to perform, *Unlimited SaGa* consists of seven more personal stories based upon the so-called Seven Wonders. Depending on which character you select at the start, your ultimate goal will vary from a simple delivery to Armic's quest to bring rain to his town. Whoever you choose, you'll get at least a glimpse of someone else's story, but the quests vary greatly in difficulty, length and quality.

Xenosaga Episode 1

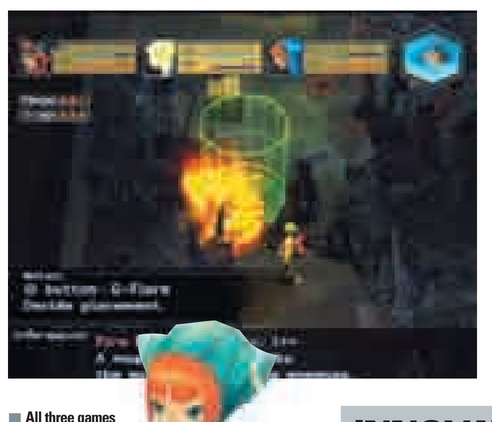
Genetic alteration and moral issues abound in a wonderfully paced and constantly evolving tale. Sadly, *Xenosaga* can't fit this great story into the gameplay – it suffers from what could be called '*Metal Gear Solid 2* syndrome', leaving much of the storytelling to the cut-scenes. While these are stunningly rendered and brilliantly scripted, if you'd rather be playing most of the way, we'd have to suggest you consider an alternative.







Bleak future worlds seem to be popular among RPGs these days. Whatever happened to good old-fashioned cod-medieval adventuring, eh?



All three games will appeal to RPG fans, though some are less accessible for newcomers.





Dragon Quarter's Scenario Overlay system is an ingenious way of rewarding repeated play, while *Unlimited Saga*'s stat-heavy gaming goes above and beyond what's normally seen in a console RPG. *Xenosaga* prefers to draw on traditional elements, but does it very well.

INNOVATION What new elements can our contenders offer?

Breath Of Fire

The best new element here has to be the integration of field and battle. You can set traps to distract or damage wandering monsters before either attacking them or sneaking by unnoticed – something you'll need to do since some foes are too strong to take on. The other key feature is the Scenario Overlay system, which adds extra elements to the story in subsequent playthroughs. As this isn't the longest of games, it's good to see incentives for repeated play.

Unlimited SaGa

The stat-heavy *Unlimited SaGa* is hardly innovative, but there's a lot here that goes beyond what's expected of the genre. Freedom in the true sense of the word is almost non-existent – not once will you control a character or wander around a field or world map as everything takes place in menus, on boards or in battle. But for every great concept there's a letdown – from going against traditional RPG principles to throwing you in at the deep end, this isn't for casual or impatient gamers

Xenosaga Episode 1

Xenosaga is familiarity done well rather than something stunningly new, but there are plenty of good elements. Winning a battle, for instance, earns your party four types of upgrade points as well as the obligatory cash and items. This makes character evolution a very personal thing, allowing upgrades of individual stats as well as the usual level-up bonuses, and even the transferral of skills with enough points. Far from revolutionary, but the game doesn't need anything more.

BATTLE SYSTEMS How easy is it to fight the good fight?

Breath Of Fire

The battles are by far the strongest aspect of *Breath Of Fire*. At each turn, a character receives Action Points that must be spent to do anything – moving, attacking or using items – so you can chain together moves with startling freedom. Probably the most notable change is the reduced use of Ryu's dragon side – transformations to the single dragon are now highly restricted and should your D-counter reach 100 per cent, it's game over. Harsh maybe, but we can see why…

Unlimited SaGa

SaGa's combat uses a set of reels as virtual dice to calculate damage, though the complex system also lets you string combos together and learn super powerful skills. This is the one area of the game (save for character evolution) that offers true freedom, making for some excellent moments in one of the most impressive turn-based systems we've seen. Sadly, random encounters in the dungeons can be annoyingly frequent, and you'll be lucky to survive the onslaughts for long.

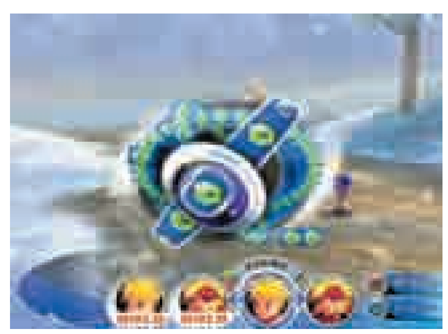
Xenosaga Episode 1

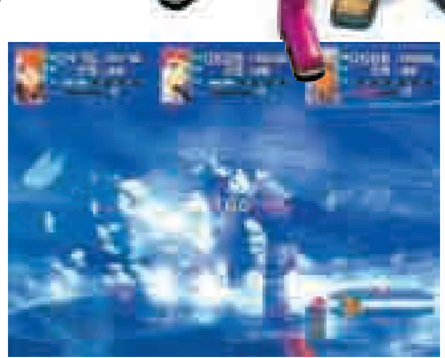
Xenosaga's combat works a little like that of *Dragon Quarter* – when your turn comes around, Action Points can be spent on multiple actions or saved for bigger attacks. That said, there are some excellent twists, with the many commodities earned from victory being used to augment characters and share skills. Add a wealth of innovative features and you've got a very solid battle system that carries the game along well.



What would be the point of an RPG without a few good fights? Thankfully, all three titles cut the mustard when it comes to battle systems.







VERDICT Summing up the overall package

Breath Of Fire

The main thing here is that *Dragon Quarter* is a *Breath Of Fire* game only in name – much of what is expected of the series is nowhere to be seen. The Scenario Overlay system is a great concept but somewhat flawed in its execution, showing those that restart the game early the same extras as people who've finished it. Ultimately, it's the ingenious battle system that wins through, allowing for some clever combinations of attacks and skills in a way seldom seen in the genre.

Difficulty is a big problem – items, money and Save Tokens are rare and some encounters are little more than elongated 'game over' sequences, especially early on. This encourages the use of the Give Up option which means you'll see the first hour or so several times before really setting off on your quest.

RATING 7

A very respectable change of direction for this well-loved series

Unlimited SaGa

If RPGs are a niche genre, this intensive number-cruncher is in a minority within it. *SaGa* is far closer to tabletop RPGs than it is to traditional console ones, which will, unfortunately, reduce its audience. 'Hard-core' is perhaps the best word to describe *Unlimited SaGa* as the amount of care, attention and time you'll need to invest in order to make anything resembling progress is vast.

The pages of statistics can prove daunting even for a more experienced player – just keeping track of your diminishing equipment and increasing skills as well as coping with the task in hand treads a fine line of being a thorough experience or just too complicated to be fun. It certainly won't appeal to Joe Public but if you're looking for a huge, stylish adventure with bit of meat on it, *Unlimited SaGa* is worth a look.

RATING 6

A heavy-going epic for seasoned RPG players only – newcomers will be a little overwhelmed

Xenosaga Episode 1

Your overall view of *Xenosaga* depends on your opinion of cut-scenes. We're not talking minute-long interludes here either – the fact that some of the longer sequences offer save points halfway through should be some indication of what we mean. But while we'd prefer to be dragged into the action while playing, the content, direction and polished presentation of these sequences cannot be ignored.

Obviously, we'd be less enthusiastic were the actual gameplay sections (which are far lengthier and more numerous than we may have made out – the cut-scene-to-gameplay ratio balances out as you progress) not so impressive in their detail, but no one area is notably lacking. This makes for a wonderfully rounded RPG package that rivals any similar title of the last few years in every key area and comes highly recommended.

RATING 8

An impressive RPG from an unlikely source – very highly recommended

WINNER

WHICH GAME HEADS UP THE PARTY?

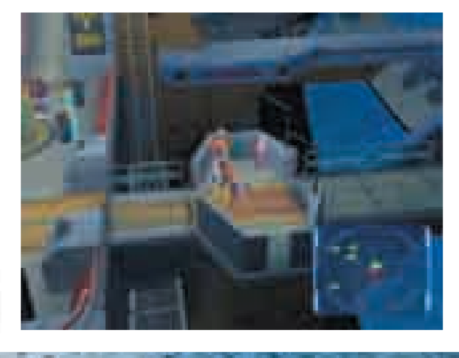
XENOSAGA EPISODE 1: DER WILLE ZUR MACHT

The last thing we want to do is single out one game you should play exclusively – each title will appeal to different individuals and, if you can, we recommend you check out all three. That said, *Xenosaga* did stand out and, while we're aware that the cut-scenes will be seen as a flaw by some, RPGs find it notoriously hard to deliver an evolving story without some degree of inactivity on the part of the player.

With intermittent sequences that play out like glorious mini-movies breaking up the in-depth and heavily customisable character evolution, you'll be hard-pressed not to be drawn into Namco's dark vision of the future. A traditional RPG with plenty of good ideas and interesting themes, *Xenosaga* will no doubt split audiences, but from a technical standpoint and a comparative one, there's very little with which to find fault.

With episode two of *Xenosaga* just unveiled in Japan, we're already looking towards the heavily augmented future. For now though, we're perfectly content going through this game again – curse those horribly addictive mini-games…

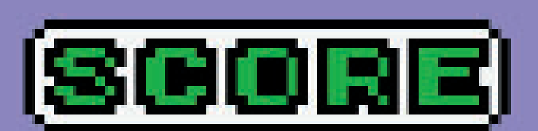








Many more space battles will soon be available! **Space Harrier Arcade [SEGA] 1985**


SCORE
417530
STAGE 1


eMag



A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.9 AUGUST 2003
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
ZOOL
Was Gremlin's ninja ant of the Nth Dimension really such a hero?
TREASURE
We take a look at the work of this lesser known developer
THIS MONTH IN 1991
As Sonic The Hedgehog turns heads around the world, America awaits Nintendo's new console
RETRO MUSIC
Join us as we sample a selection of C64 soundtrack CDs
WHY DON'T THEY REMAKE?
GOLDEN AXE
From arcade smash hit to relative obscurity in a few short years
AMSTRAD
WE CELEBRATE THE CPC 464!
Plus all the regular retro goodness that any gamer could wish for

RETRO NEWS

FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE HERE AND NOW OF RETRO GAMING...

What makes a game a classic? Well, anyone trying to prove they're a hard-core gamer would probably argue that gameplay is the important factor, though it isn't nearly as simple as that. Some of our favourite games haven't been that great to play, but are still loved by gamers around the world.

Take *Final Fight*, for instance. It was hardly ingenious in terms of game design and there were many other similarly structured alternatives. Even so, something about it kept those 20p pieces dropping into the coin-op month after month.

So what gives a game that ability to make people sit up and take notice? Sometimes it's the visuals – *Flashback*, for example, was certainly eye-catching, even for those who didn't think it was the greatest game ever.

But one element that's often overlooked and that can make or break the atmosphere of a game is its music. Thankfully, more companies are now releasing game soundtracks, and with the retro music scene thriving, the selection of CDs available is far more varied than you may realise...



Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

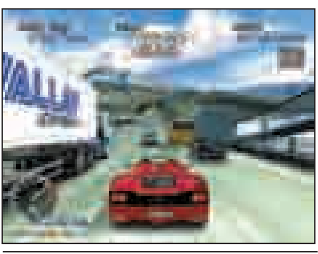
OUT RUN 2 REVEALED

SEGA unveils the retro remake we all hoped it was working on

After months of speculation, SEGA has finally released screenshots of the much-anticipated sequel to its 1986 arcade classic, *Out Run*. Yu Suzuki, the man behind the original, is once again in charge of the project, with AM2 preparing the game for an arcade release this autumn. Although nothing has been confirmed, it's expected that an Xbox version will follow some time later, seeing as the program is running on the Xbox-compatible Chichiro arcade board.

As for gameplay details, little is definite so far, though it's already clear that multiple routes will be available (just like the first game) and that a female passenger will once again be with you in your Ferrari. This time, however, the lovely lady will also act as a grading system for your driving. It's expected that this will work similarly to the passenger system in *Crazy Taxi*, whereby near misses and special moves will be rewarded.

As you can see, *Out Run 2* is already looking gorgeous, with a graphical style somewhere between *Crazy Taxi* and *Burnout 2*. Look out for more details when we get them.



▲ The graphics are a massive improvement over the original, and the gameplay should be just as good.



▲ Your foxy lady friend will award you points for near-misses and stunts. Just like life...

OLD FOR NEW

Midway brings retro classics to current consoles

Rather than going up into the loft and rummaging through all your old computers and consoles in order to relive that classic videogaming experience, Midway will soon be offering a simpler alternative – the *Midway Arcade Treasures* retro selection pack.

Launching on all major consoles this autumn, the pack will feature more than 20 arcade classics, completely unadulterated in their original form. The disc will also include DVD-style bonus features, such as developer interviews and behind-the-scenes details on how the games were created.



▲ *Paperboy* will now be available on your fancy next-gen consoles in all its blocky glory.

ON THE DISC

The Midway Arcade Treasure Pack

720°	Rampart
Blaster	Road Blasters
Bubbles	Robotron 2084
Defender II	Satan's Hollow
Gauntlet	Sinistar
Joust	Smash TV
Joust 2	Splat!
KLAX	SpyHunter
Marble Madness	Super Sprint
Paperboy	Toobin
Rampage	Vindicators

DATA CEASED

So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen...

After years of struggling, the once popular Japanese development house, Data East, has declared itself bankrupt. The company was highly regarded within the arcade industry for titles such as *Bad Dudes Vs. Dragon Ninja*, *Boulder Dash* and *Caveman Ninja*, though it began to have difficulties towards the end of the 16-bit era and never really grasped the concept of polygons. At the time of the declaration, Data East was thought to be ¥3 billion in the red.



▲ Data East's *Boulder Dash* was a huge hit.





As we were saying goodbye to Kylie and Jason and hello to trance and all-night raves, US gamers were replacing Mario with, well, Mario. Apart from the growing anticipation for the SNES though, it was over the summer period that Sonic The Hedgehog had launched in Japan and the States, so stepping up the rivalry between SEGA and Nintendo…

MEMORABLE MOVIES IN 1991 (AMERICA)

1. **Terminator 2**
   Grossed $204,843,350
2. **Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves**
   Grossed $165,500,000
3. **Hook**
   Grossed $119,654,900
4. **The Addams Family**
   Grossed $113,502,000
5. **Fried Green Tomatoes**
   Grossed $80,100,000
6. **Cape Fear**
   Grossed $79,100,000
7. **JFK**
   Grossed $70,405,498
8. **Beauty And The Beast**
   Grossed $25,487,028
9. **Don't Tell Mom The Babysitter's Dead**
   Grossed $25,196,249
10. **The Commitments**
   Grossed $14,919,570

UK CHARTS FOR AUG 1991

1. **(Everything I Do) I Do It For You** Bryan Adams
2. **More Than Words**
   Extreme
3. **I'm Too Sexy**
   Right Said Fred
4. **Move Any Mountain**
   Shamen
5. **Now That We've Found Love**
   Heavy D & The Boyz
6. **All For Love**
   Color Me Badd
7. **Winter In July**
   Bomb The Bass
8. **Set Adrift On Memory Bliss**
   PM Dawn
9. **Things That Make You Go Hmmmm…**
   C&C Music Factory
10. **Summertime**
   DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince

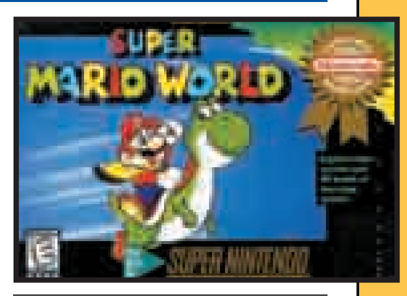
GAMING NEWS AUGUST 91

America Prepares For A Super Launch

Having dominated the games industry for years with its NES, the summer of 1991 would prove to be a test of strength for Nintendo. SEGA had already launched the Mega Drive around the world and although sales had only been moderate, the release of *Sonic The Hedgehog* in America on 23 June and Japan on 26 July had certainly turned a few heads. SEGA's machine was also $50 (£31) cheaper than the SNES at just $150 (£92), making it an attractive purchase for those wishing to play decent translations of the latest arcade games, as well as *Sonic The Hedgehog*, of course.

Even so, with the SNES set to launch stateside in September, the three-month head start that *Sonic* had had over the system wasn't enough to deter many hard-core Nintendo fans from holding out for the latest *Mario Bros*. adventure. As it turned out, *Super Mario World*, which came packaged with the SNES hardware for $200 (£123), turned out to be one of the greatest videogames of all time.

As you can imagine, the amount of hype generated by Nintendo of America was reaching fever pitch by August 1991. The SNES had already been ridiculously popular in Japan since its launch ten months previously, and although the success of the system in North America was looking



▶ It's *Mario World*. And it's super, thanks for asking.

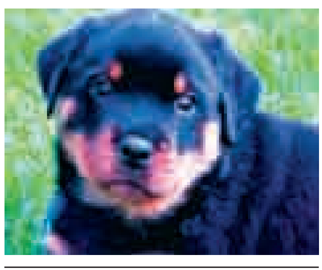
to be a certainty, Nintendo couldn't afford to take any risks with SEGA breathing down its neck. In a case of history repeating itself, a similar situation arose between SEGA and Sony when Dreamcast and PlayStation2 were in direct competition. Unfortunately for SEGA, Sony did a better job of out-classing the competition than Nintendo had all those years earlier, despite its surprisingly flawed 128-bit technology.

And while on the subject of flawed technology – it was interesting that Nintendo should choose to redesign the SNES casing exclusively for the American market. While the Japanese and European model featured smooth curves and brightly coloured buttons, the American version was square, angular and had had the multi-coloured buttons replaced with two shades of purple. Ugly as it was though, there's a special place in our hearts for the American SNES.

WORLD NEWS

DANGEROUS DOGS

It was in this month in 1991 that a two-year-old girl was savaged by a Rottweiler dog in Stokesley, North Yorkshire. The incident happened as the child was being



▶ This guy? Dangerous? Apparently so…

carried by her father. According to eyewitness reports, the girl was grabbed by the head and pulled to the ground where her father wrestled the dog away.

The Stokesley incident was the last in a long line of attacks since 1989, many of which had occurred in the sweltering summer heat. There were so many attacks over that period, in fact, that the Dangerous Dogs Act was passed in May 1991, requiring all notoriously vicious breeds such as Pitbulls and Rottweilers to be muzzled in public places, registered and neutered.



Why Don't They Remake?

G·O·L·D·E·N A·X·E

Released: **1989**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **In-House**
Format: **Arcade**

SEGA does some strange things. For a company that's desperately trying to stay afloat, you'd think it would be making the most of all the wonderful licences that it's worked on through the years, yet somehow SEGA has always managed to overlook some of it's most popular franchises… like *Golden Axe*, perhaps.

The original *Golden Axe* arrived in arcades across the world in 1989 and starred a cast of three colourful characters – Ax Battler the Barbarian, Tyris Flare the Amazon and Gilius Thunderhead the Dwarf – each offering slightly different attacks and special moves. Two people could play the game simultaneously, and although progression through the levels consisted of little more than walking right and knocking out a few bad guys, something about the design made for an incredibly addictive experience.

Of course, if *Golden Axe* was ever




remade the formula would need to be expanded somewhat to make it worthwhile. However, *Golden Axe* could easily be brought up to date, possibly by incorporating online play.

While some network games offer only one-on-one deathmatches, others are so horribly complicated that they scare off all but the most hard-core players. A game like *Golden Axe*, however, could be the perfect online title for newcomers and those who don't have hours of free time to play. Just imagine being able to enter a magical world where you can ride dragons and other mythical beasts, while working in a team beating up ogres, without pages and pages of stats to sort through.

Unfortunately, such a game doesn't exist right now, but one day, perhaps…

THE NEXT BEST THING

Golden Axe

Although not quite the remake we were hoping for, SEGA is actually releasing an updated version of the original *Golden Axe* in Japan this autumn as part of its SEGA Ages PS2 range. Featuring 3D graphics and remixed music, it will be interesting to see how authentic the game turns out.



▶ Well, it looks a bit like *Golden Axe* anyway…

THIS MONTH'S FAVOURITES

The choicest cuts of classic retro gaming that have kept us indoors during these bright summer days. And those summer nights, too…

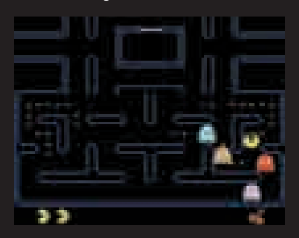
SUPER MARIO BROS 3

Seeing as *Super Mario Bros 3* is being released on GBA this autumn, we thought we'd have a quick play to see if it really is as good as we remember. And it is.



PAC-MAN

After playing *Pac-Man* again, it's easy to see why Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto is so fond of the game. We wouldn't pay £40 for the GameCube version though.



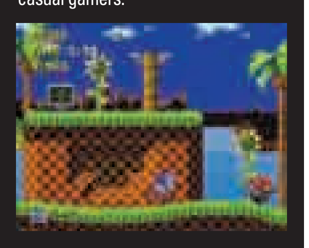
STRIDER

For many, *Strider* was just another arcade adventure game in the same mould as *Shinobi* and *Ninja Gaiden*. However, true gamers know that the level designs were superior.



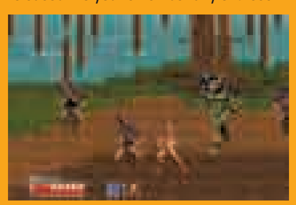
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

It's amazing how well *Sonic* has stood the test of time. At more than ten years old, it still manages to feel fresh and engaging, for both hard-core and casual gamers.

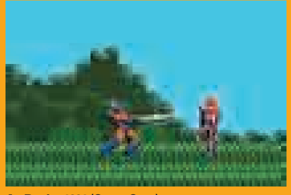


GOLDEN WONDERS

Aside from the original arcade game, a few other *Golden Axe* titles have been released. Do you remember any of these?



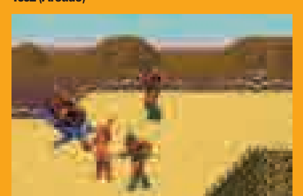
Golden Axe II 1991 (Mega Drive)



Ax Battler 1991 (Game Gear)



Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder 1992 (Arcade)



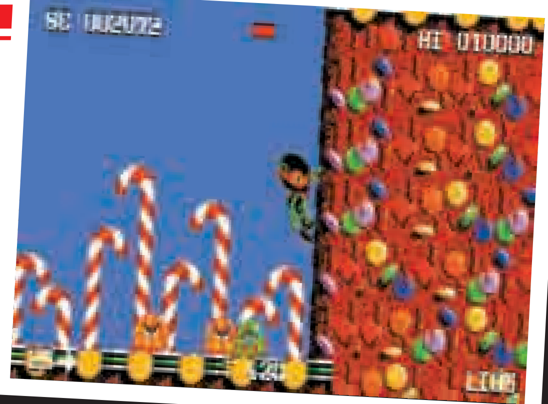
Golden Axe III 1993 (Mega Drive)



Golden Axe: The Duel 1994/95 (Arcade, Saturn)



ZOOL: NINJA OF THE NTH DIMENSION



"ONCE EVERY YEAR, THE GAMES WORLD IS ROCKED BY A GAME SO STUNNING, SO FAST, SO COLOURFUL, SO BIG, SO AWESOME, SO VARIED..." AT LEAST ZOOL'S PUBLISHER LIKED THE GAME...

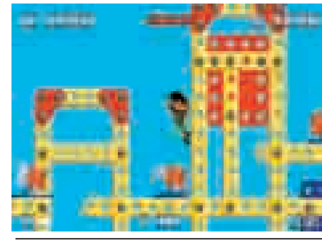
Mario is just a plumber, right? A plumber who's sold millions of videogames and consoles around the world perhaps, but still just a plumber nonetheless. And what about Sonic The Hedgehog – he doesn't even look like a hedgehog. Surely that's exactly how the designers of *Zool: Ninja Of The Nth Dimension* must have justified their actions when they set out to create what's arguably one of the most over-rated platform games ever to be forced upon the gaming public.

Initially designed for the Commodore Amiga, it's fair to say that *Zool* didn't really have that much competition; there were plenty of platform games available for the system, but none that could boast the same level of innovation or popularity as the likes of *Sonic* or *Mario*. Of course, a lack of competition is no excuse for launching a half-baked product. To be fair, *Zool* wasn't that awful, but it wasn't much good either. Even so, that didn't stop Gremlin from making out that *Zool* was the next big thing, and for some reason the press seemed to agree.

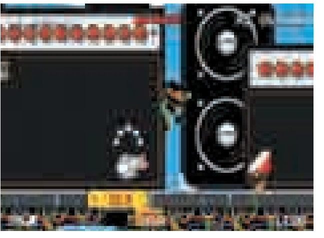
You see, aside from the eponymous hero, the rest of the game was completely predictable in just about every way imaginable. The themed worlds, which included Music World and the unforgettable Sweet World which was garishly coloured and covered with Smarties, couldn't hide the fact that the levels had been thrown together with very little thought. Add to that some gameplay that revolved around scaling walls and collecting myriad pointless items, and it was suddenly obvious that *Zool* wasn't quite what it was hyped up to be. But the very worst thing about *Zool* was that you had to press Up to jump, and that really was unforgivable.

Amazingly, despite its many flaws, the game was still converted to various other home systems and was even released as an arcade coin-op. A follow-up was also developed and was amusingly ported to Atari's ill-fated Jaguar console. So, a fitting end to what could so easily have been a very horrible series.

▲ Maybe he is a ninja, but if you have to press Up to jump then we're just not interested. Sorry.



▲ A superhero ant? Oh, please...



▲ Music World saw no respite from the garish and wackily themed backgrounds and enemies.

GREAT GAME BOSSES

AXLE GEAR/PIG MECH – ROCKET KNIGHT ADVENTURES

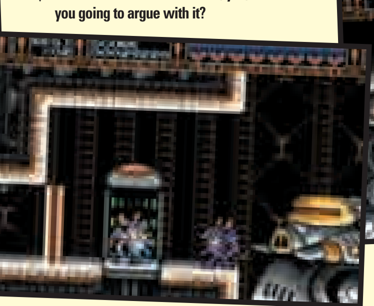
In a game so full of memorable boss encounters, it's difficult to highlight one as the definitive showdown, but for sheer originality we have to hand it to Axle's Pig Mech.

Having already despatched a giant steel fish, several robot snakes and more pigs than you could ever hope to keep track of, you reach the end of Stage 5 only to be pursued by a huge mechanical suit piloted by none other than your nemesis Axle Gear. Vastly outgunned, you're given no option but to flee for your life so you make a break for it, negotiating a complicated obstacle course all the while fully aware of the metal monstrosity gaining ground on you.

You can't run forever though, and just when it seems as though it could be too late, you stumble across salvation – several tons of salvation to be precise – and suddenly Axle isn't the only one piloting a mech.

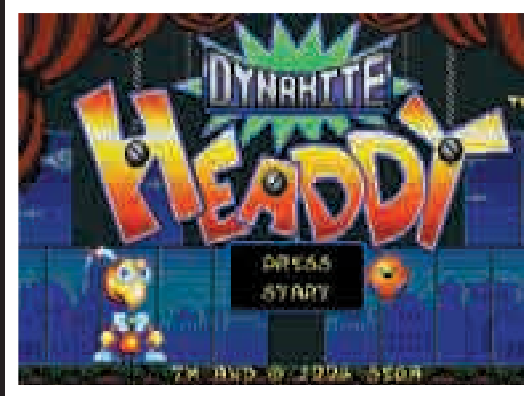
The playing field now level, the battle begins and the two behemoths duke it out, wildly flailing ball-and-chain arms at one another in the largest-scale boxing match the videogaming world has ever seen. It may not be the most traditional boss nor is it the most technically impressive, but in terms of pure white-knuckle, adrenaline-pumping action, they really don't come much finer than this.

▼ An unconventional mech suit, yes, but are you going to argue with it?



▲ Giant metal pigs with arms like maces. Every home should have one.







Treasure Chest

Since Gunstar Heroes on the SEGA Mega Drive, Treasure has crafted some of the most sought-after (and pricey) Japanese videogames. But is the company truly a box of delights as the name would suggest, or does it simply play on target marketing and quirkiness to sell its niche titles?

Another Konami Konnection

Treasure is currently working with the *Tiny Toons* licence on two new videogames – *Tiny Toons: Defenders Of The Loonyverse* for PlayStation2, and *Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster's Bad Dream* for Game Boy Advance. Although details are scarce for either game, it's interesting that this breakaway team of ex-Konami employees should be working with a licence that was once so prolific for Konami itself.



▲ Treasure is currently working with the *Tiny Toons* licence. Can it match the quality of Konami's *Tiny Toon* titles?

Situated in West Shinjuku, Tokyo, Treasure was started up with ¥30 million (approximately £150,000) on 9 June, 1992. Although the company has never been particularly well known among the Western gaming masses, in hard-core circles, especially those in Japan, it's common knowledge that many of the founding members and initial programmers and designers that helped to set up the now 32-strong company were ex-Konami staff. It's a similar situation to when a group of Rare employees broke off to form Free Radical.

Of course, back in 1992 when Treasure was started up, graphics technology and the videogames industry in general wasn't nearly as evolved as when Free Radical split from Rare, though there were many parallels between the two new companies. At the time, Konami was still developing 2D sprite-based games and was highly regarded within the industry for the quality of products such as *Turtles In Time*, *Buster Busts Loose* and *The Legend Of the Mystical Ninja* amongst many others. When Treasure released its first game, *Gunstar Heroes*, it managed to capture all the values that Konami stood for, but at the same time felt new and fresh. Just as Free Radical would later capture much of the spirit and British humour for which Rare was well known, Treasure managed to do exactly the same with Konami in Japan.

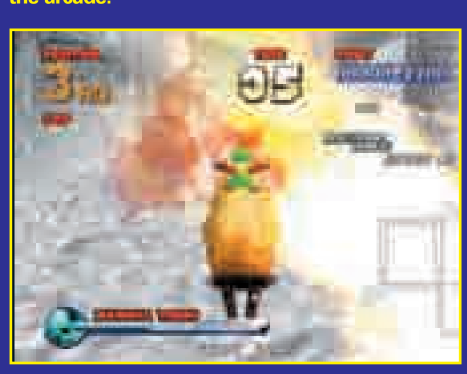
Although Treasure's first release came out just one year before Sony launched the PlayStation, the company continued to gain popularity throughout the remainder of the 16-bit era. Further releases such as *Dynamite Headdy* and *Alien Soldier* cemented the Treasure name as one of the premium Mega Drive developers and made it clear that Konami had lost some of its most creative people to this extraordinary little company.

Sadly, the console generation that followed saw a few cracks appearing in some of Treasure's game design. Many of those employed at the company had previously worked predominantly with sprites and 2D scrolling backdrops, while the new line-up of polygon-pushing powerhouses required knowledge of 3D manipulation. Interestingly, Konami also struggled to come to terms with this new type of game – until the questionably average *NBA In The Zone* launched late in 1995, the company's PSone games consisted mostly of retro compilation discs, such as *Parodius*. In fact, it wasn't until

Beat It

One of the only completely 3D games that Treasure worked on was an arcade title called *Gun Beat*. Running on SEGA's Naomi board, the game was shown in playable form at numerous shows and was expected to be translated across to the Dreamcast following its release in the arcade.

Similar in design to *Panzer Dragoon*, the gameplay revolved around shooting enemies while galloping along on an enormous hamster. Sadly, the project was canned, and despite rumours that it would be included as an extra with *Ikaruga*, the code has never been released.





▲ Despite looking promising (and a little odd), *Gun Beat* was cancelled prior to its planned launch in 1999.





▲ *Gunstar Heroes* for the Mega Drive and Game Gear was perhaps the definitive side-scrolling shooter of the early Nineties.

Treasure Softography

Gunstar Heroes
– Mega Drive/ Game Gear (1993, 1995)

Dynamite Headdy
– Mega Drive/ Game Gear (1994)

McDonald's Treasure Land Adventure
– Mega Drive (1993)

Alien Soldier
– Mega Drive (1995)

Guardian Heroes
– Saturn (1996)

Silhouette Mirage
– Saturn/PlayStation (1997, 1998)

Radiant Silvergun
– Arcade/Saturn (1998)

Bangai-O
– Nintendo 64/ Dreamcast (1999, 2000)

Rakugaki Showtime
– PlayStation (1999)

Silpheed: The Lost Planet
– PlayStation2 (2000)

Sin And Punishment
– Nintendo 64 (2000)

Freak Out
– PlayStation2 (2001)

Ikaruga
– Arcade/Dreamcast/GameCube (2001, 2002, 2003)

Wario World
– GameCube (2003)

the release of *Metal Gear Solid* that Konami proved it could cut the proverbial mustard.

For Treasure, on the other hand, the 32/64-bit generation never really gave the company the opportunity to prove itself, other than to the fans who still loved the retro-style titles it was developing. *Guardian Heroes* on the Saturn, for example, was a stunning scrolling beat-'em-up with RPG elements that was massively popular with hard-core SEGA fans, but completely ignored by virtually everyone else. The same can be said for the N64 adventure game *Mischief Makers*, which again only ever received attention from the most hard-core players. But although Treasure never really achieved market saturation with any of its titles, its arcade/Saturn shoot-'em-up *Radiant Silvergun* received plenty of critical acclaim from the press. Only ever released in Japan, this old-school, up-screen extravaganza cleverly used the combined power of the Saturn's 2D and 3D processors to create impressive pseudo 3D environments and some solid 2D gameplay.

The current generation has proved possibly the most difficult for Treasure. With games development costing more than ever before, it's no longer viable for the company to work exclusively on niche market products. With the quality of releases such as *Silpheed: The Lost Planet* and *Freak Out* being questionable at best, if it wasn't for a number of recent partnerships with larger developers, we'd be worrying about the company's future. However, with the GameCube releases of *Ikaruga* (the follow-up to *Radiant Silvergun*) and *Wario World*, Treasure's games certainly seem to be getting more attention than ever before, even if the review scores are generally lower. *Wario World* was widely seen as being worse than most of Nintendo's in-house titles, though the licence alone is helping to shift copies.

Despite its recent success though, Treasure's future is still a potentially rocky ride. The company is currently in a partnership with Konami and is working on the latest instalment in the *Gradius* series. Looking a lot like *Ikaruga*, the game is likely to be a hit with shoot-'em-up fans, though it will be interesting to see if Konami can market it to a wider audience. Who knows, if Konami was to package a playable demo of *Metal Gear Solid 3* with it, we could be looking at Treasure's first million seller…



STAR GAMES

Some films are made into games, but some games appear in films. This month we look at Jackie Chan's City Hunter, a lesser-known Hong Kong comedy based on an anime cartoon and comic book. But forget Jackie Chan, the real star of City Hunter is Street Fighter II.

While many of the games we feature in Star Games simply turn up on set, perform their cameo appearance as an inanimate object then leave, the role of *Street Fighter II* in *City Hunter* is actually far more integral to the plot. The story (which involves a detective, a large number of silicon-enhanced Asian ladies and a terrorist organisation) takes place on a luxury cruise ship which, for some reason, has a room full of *Street Fighter II* arcade cabinets on one of its lower decks. And we're not talking about some dark, smoky retro arcade here – we're talking about a chic circular room with a socialising area in the centre, a raised viewing gallery around the edges, and larger than life cut-outs of the main *Street Fighter* characters laid out in an artistic collage on the walls. However, the mere inclusion of a room with a few arcade cabinets and some nice *Street Fighter* artwork is nothing compared to the scene that takes place there…

▲ How crap like *The Silence Of The Lambs* beat this to the Best Picture Oscar in 1992 is beyond us.

The hero, Ryu Saeba (played by Jackie Chan), hurries in with his hands bound together with rope, only to find himself face to face with one of the bad guys. Though he tries his best to defend himself, it isn't long before he's thrown into one of the surrounding *Street Fighter* cabinets, where he's subsequently electrocuted by the damaged circuit boards. Rather than simply being zapped unconscious, Saeba gets straight back to his feet only to find that his rival has been transformed into Ken from *Street Fighter*, complete with red karate suit and dodgy blond haircut. Just like the game, this Ken-alike Hurricane Kicks his way across the room, repeatedly smacking Saeba across the face in the process and knocking him to his knees in front of another *Street Fighter* cabinet. In a close-up of the screen itself, we see the dazed star move the selection cursor over E. Honda and press the start button. And this is when things start to get really strange…



▲ Woe betide the person who makes fun of Dhalsim's shoddy skullcap…



▲ This being Jackie Chan, they probably didn't use wires for this scene. Well, we like to think so.

Complete with authentic music and sound effects, Saeba gets back to his feet and has miraculously transformed into Honda himself. Moving in for the attack, he begins his Hundred-Hand Slap, only to be hilariously thrown across the room by Ken. Getting back to his feet once more, he goes in with a Sumo Headbutt, only to miss and crash headfirst into one of the surrounding walls. Luckily, two fellow good guys in the form of Guile and Dhalsim are on hand to continue the fight.

After showing off his impressive Yoga Flame Dhalsim uses his stretchy limbs to clobber Ken with a strong kick to the face, after which Guile attempts to finish him with Sonic Booms. Unfortunately, their attacks are no match for Ken's powerful Hadokens, and the two are blasted right out of the room.



▲ Striking a blow for girl power, Chun Li whups Ken's red-pyjamaed ass.

Thankfully though, this brief interlude has given Saeba time to prepare himself for the final showdown, and he returns dressed as none other than the leggy one herself, Chun-Li. Amazingly, Chan's portrayal of this delicate oriental flower is one of his most authentic character roles to date and includes all the token special moves, including the devastating Spinning Bird Kick.

Of course, Ken stands no chance after taking so much damage already and is knocked to the ground, after which Chun-Li performs her famously excited winning animation. Ya ta!



Metal Gear (NES) Konami, 1988 – American advertisement



SPECIFICATIONS

The CPC's cross-purpose design (it could be used for business and pleasure) meant there was a lot going on under the casing.

Processor: Zilog Z80
Speed: 4 MHz
RAM: 64 KB
Colours: 27
Sound: 3 channels, 8 octaves +1 noise channel

AMSTRAD CPC 464

OFTEN RIDICULED BY COMMODORE 64 AND SPECTRUM OWNERS, ALAN SUGAR'S CPC 464 WAS STILL A CLASSIC MACHINE AND WELL WORTH LOOKING BACK AT...

Upon its release in 1984, Amstrad's unique marketing for the CPC 464 immediately made it stand apart from its two main rivals. For starters, you didn't have to worry about digging out your old tape deck from the loft, or waiting in line to use the living room TV, because the CPC was an all-in-one-system.

Of course, having the luxury of a built-in cassette deck and colour monitor complete with 27 different colours (or 27 shades of green if you had the monochrome version) came at a price. You could expect to pay a whopping £400 for the colour version of Amstrad's machine – compare this to the relatively low cost of the Spectrum (£175) and it was easy to see why one achieved mass-market success and the other didn't. As far as visuals and audio went, the Amstrad uncomfortably occupied the middle ground between the Spectrum and the Commodore 64.

Whilst arguably a better looking and sounding machine than the Spectrum (although it did suffer from many ports because it shared the same processor), it always seemed to get ridiculed by C64 owners – a shame really, as it was a user-friendly machine and featured some great arcade conversions.

SIBLING RIVALRY

To complement the CPC 464, Amstrad released the 664 and the 6128. Both computers had floppy drives and proved to be very popular as business machines, especially the more powerful CPC 6128. Perhaps the strangest machine was the CPC 472. This was a special Spanish version that was made to avoid the tax on selling computers in Spain with less than 64KB of RAM and no 'ñ' key. Eventually, all computers sold in Spain – even those with less than 64KB – had to have a Spanish keyboard so Amstrad ended up making two versions.

"WHY I LOVE MY CPC 464"

Not only was the CPC 464 the first proper computer I ever owned, it was also responsible for bringing to my attention the 'my machine is better than yours' tirades that have since followed me for the rest of my gaming life.

Even today I'll still dust the old bird off for a quick game (well, as quick as tapes can be) of *Dizzy*, *Target Renegade* or *Solomon's Key*. Nineteen years on and I'm still playing it – that's longevity for you...

Darran Jones

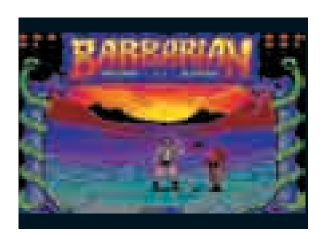
SIX OF THE BEST

Though often subjected to hasty Spectrum ports, the Amstrad CPC 464 played host to a range of its own great titles. Like these…

BARBARIAN: THE ULTIMATE WARRIOR

Publisher: **Palace**
Year: **1987**

It's safe to say that prepubescent gamers were as excited with *Barbarian*'s cover (depicting a scantily clad Maria Whittaker) as they were with the game itself. Those that dragged themselves away found a wonderfully playable fighter with copious bloodshed and some very challenging opponents. The best part, however, was undoubtedly the gruesome decapitations that resulted in a goblin dragging the body away whilst unceremoniously kicking the loser's head across the floor.



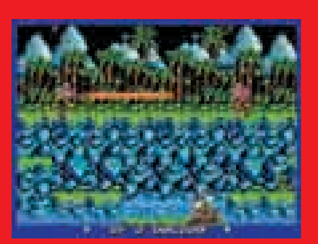


GRYZOR

Publisher: **Imagine**
Year: **1987**

Known throughout the world as either *Contra* or *Probotector*, *Gryzor* was yet another classic arcade conversion from those talented coders at Imagine. This classic scrolling shooter was packed full of detail and represented a real challenge to anyone with an itchy trigger figure. Once you got to the later levels, things got even more impressive (not to mention hectic) with some great 3D sections and some suitably tough bosses.

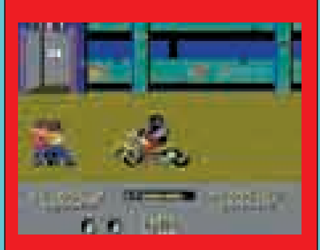




TARGET RENEGADE

Publisher: **Imagine**
Year: **1988**

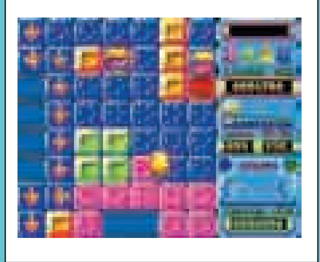
Forget the god-awful versions of *Double Dragon* that plagued all the home machines – this was how to do a perfect two-player beat-'em-up. After the superb Amstrad version of *Renegade*, Imagine's follow-up was a natural progression for the series. Ditching the gritty visuals of the original, *Target Renegade* featured cartoony sprites to complement the over-the-top action and gave you a whole host of weapons with which to attack your assailants. Believe us when we say you'll never look at a pool cue in the same way again…



SKWEEK

Publisher: **Loricels**
Year: **1989**

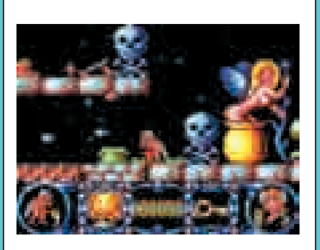
Every console needs a good puzzler to keep the old grey matter ticking over and this offering from Loricels was no exception. Taking on the role of the eponymous Skweek, you were presented with 99 well-designed levels that had been covered blue by pesky aliens. Moving Skweek across the blue tiles turned them back to a more pleasing looking pink – cover the entire level and you'd move onto the next one. A plethora of power-ups, enemies and different types of tiles meant that *Skweek* lasted absolutely ages.



STORMLORD

Publisher: **Hewson**
Year: **1989**

After the amazing successes of the *Cybernoid* games and *Exolon*, Raffaele Cecco cemented his reputation as a superb Amstrad programmer with the release of the gobsmackingly good *Stormlord*. Set in an amazing-looking fantasy world (complete with massive mushrooms and semi-nude fairies) *Stormlord* was a fantastic platformer that saw you rescuing fairies from four different levels. Even the ridiculously hard difficulty setting did little to stem your enthusiasm for the later levels. All in all, an instant classic.



DRILLER

Publisher: **Incentive**
Year: **1987**

Easily the most ambitious game on the Amstrad, *Driller* was the first title to use the revolutionary Freescape engine (a new 3D program). The Ketars had abandoned their mining expeditions on Mitral and it was down to you to install 18 rigs so that the built-up gas could be safely dispersed. While playing *Driller* was an incredibly laborious process, there was no denying that this was something really special. Later Freescape games like *Dark Side* and *Castle Master* continued to push the CPC to its graphical limits



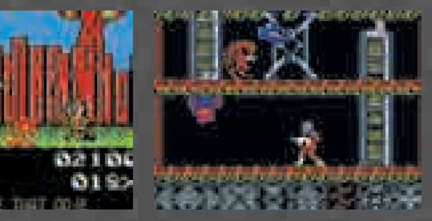
AMSTRAD

64k COLOUR PERSONAL COMPUTER

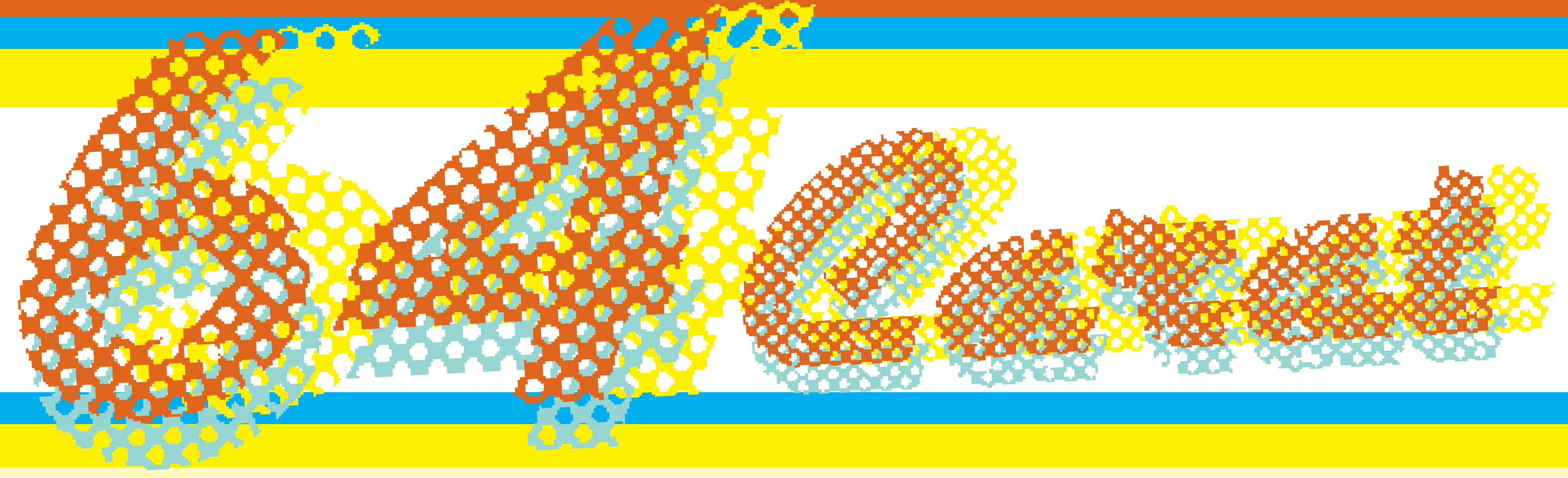


CPC 464 COLOUR

Classic Machine







DO YOU REMEMBER THE MUSIC FROM YOUR FAVOURITE COMMODORE 64 GAMES? BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THERE ARE PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO DO MORE THAN JUST REMEMBER IT…

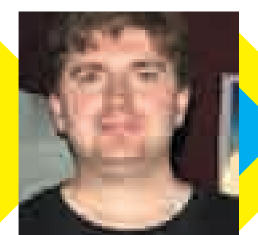
Based in Bromley, Kent, High Technology Publishing is a little different from most of the companies we feature in games™. Instead of producing titles for current or past videogame systems, HTP is an organisation that celebrates retro gaming with the release of remixed music soundtracks, mostly of tunes that accompanied Commodore 64 games.

A healthy selection of CDs are already available on the Internet (www.C64Audio.com is a good place to start) and while you might expect shoddy production quality from a company working on such esoteric merchandise, you couldn't be further from the truth. Each of the CDs currently available is as good as something you'd pick up from a high street retailer – in fact, the only reason that you can't buy them in the likes of MVC or HMV is simply because they are so niche market.

Part of the quality stems from the fact that the company has paid out more than £20,000 in fees and royalties to the composers who created the music in the first place. Already on-board are big names such as Rob Hubbard, Martin Galway, Chris Hüelsbeck and Dave Whittaker – artists who now have the comfort of knowing that their compositions are safeguarded by High Technology.

Of course, while it's all rather specialist at the moment, there's every chance that some tracks could generate a substantial amount of cash if they were ever to make it into the music charts. What's more,

Chris Abbott - The Man With The Plan



We quiz the man who had the crazy idea of producing Commodore 64 music CDs

GAMES™: HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN PLAYING VIDEOGAMES?
CA: My first videogame was a Binatone *Pong* machine. I was eight or nine at the time.

GAMES™: WAS THE MUSIC ALWAYS SOMETHING YOU WERE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN?
CA: My interest in videogame music started with the arcade game *Boot Hill*, which wittily played the Death March every time someone died.

Then I loved the music on Atari 400 games and then the C64, with *Hovver Bovver*, *Tales Of The Arabian Knights*, *China Miner* and the astonishing *Thing On A Spring* being some of my favourites.

GAMES™: WHAT IS YOUR OFFICIAL TITLE AT HIGH TECHNOLOGY PUBLISHING ?
CA: Dogsbody! But seriously, I'm the managing director of the company.

GAMES™: HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED WITH COMPANY?
CA: I don't actually employ anyone, though I work closely with a core team of three other people – Alistair 'Boz' Bowness, Jason 'Kenz' Mackenzie and Paul 'Skitz' Hadrill.

GAMES™: IS THIS YOUR MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME, OR IS THIS SOMETHING YOU DO AS WELL AS A REGULAR JOB?
CA: It has to be in addition to a regular job – the profit from CD sales tends to go into financing live events, paying royalties to composers (over £20,000 so far), and the infrastructure of running a decent Internet operation.

GAMES™: WHEN DID YOU FIRST BEGIN CREATING CDS FEATURING RETRO VIDEOGAME SOUNDTRACKS?
CA: The legal groundwork began in 1996.

GAMES™: WHERE DID THE IDEA COME FROM? WAS IT SOMETHING YOU HAD WANTED TO DO FOR A LONG TIME?
CA: The idea had been around ever since Rob Hubbard's *Thalamusik* on issue 26 of *Zzap!64*, and the subsequent *Datahits* tape, which wasn't very good but was all we had at the time. I was remixing the tunes in a simple way while they were still current, as were a lot of other, more talented programmers. At about the same time, the idea of a computer game music rock concert came about. It only took 17 years to realise…

Galway Remixed

Released: 2003
Price: £10.99
Reyn Ouwehand demonstrated his musical diversity with *Nexus 6581*, but here he tries something a little different. With a heavy emphasis on synths, *Galway Remixed* once again captures the spirit of the Eighties with an unmatched level of energy and power. Throwing a school reunion? If so, this will get them cutting some rug.

GAMES™ RATING: 9/10

Tracks

01. Parallax (title) – Martin Galway
02. Comic Bakery – Martin Galway
03. Yie-Ar Kung Fu II – Martin Galway
04. Athena – Martin Galway
05. Arkanoid – Martin Galway
06. Insects In Space – Martin Galway
07. Parallax (in-game) – Martin Galway
08. Miami Vice – Martin Galway
09. Rambo: First Blood Part 2 – Martin Galway
10. Wizball (title) – Martin Galway
11. Wizball (in-game) – Martin Galway



with the current trend for sweatbands and miniskirts, there's every chance that the decidedly Eighties-sounding synthesiser melodies featured on some of the CDs would go down a storm, if enough people get to hear them.

Aside from CD production, the man behind High Technology Publishing, Chris Abbott, has also been responsible for organising a number of retro gaming events. We spoke to him to find out a few more details about the company, the man himself, and what plans he has for the future…

GAMES™: WHAT SORT OF REACTION DID YOU GET FROM THE VARIOUS COMPOSERS WHEN YOU SUGGESTED REMIXING THEIR WORK?

CA: Rob Hubbard was cautious initially, but couldn't see how he'd lose anything by being supportive, for which I'm very grateful. Martin [Galway] didn't like the first CD much, but became progressively more enthusiastic.

Fred Gray thought it was a laugh, and Chris Hüelsbeck, trailblazer that he is, had been remixing his own stuff for ages.

GAMES™: WAS IT DIFFICULT TO GET THINGS GOING FROM A LEGAL POINT OF VIEW?

CA: It was until I found out that nobody signed contracts back then, so the composers retained the rights to their own work. People are a lot easier to deal with than companies, since most companies are up their own backsides and won't get out of bed for less than £10,000.

My project wasn't worth anywhere near that at the time, though oddly it probably did generate that amount of revenue in the end.

Nexus 6581

Released: 2000
Price: £4.99
Performed and arranged by Reyn Ouwehand, *Nexus 6581* is unmatched as far as production values go. With an eclectic mix of tracks and musical styles, the selection demonstrates Ouwehand's incredible versatility and understanding of music creation. For just £4.99, this is one CD that no retro game music fan should be without.

GAMES™ RATING: 10/10

Tracks

01. Last Ninja 3 – Reyn Ouwehand
02. Shape – Johannes Bjerregaard
03. DMC Demo IV – Johannes Bjerregaard
04. Enlightenment: Druid 2 – David Hanlon
05. Flimbo's Quest – Reyn Ouwehand
06. Dutch Breeze: Flip The Flop – Reyn Ouwehand
07. Deflektor – Ben Daglish
08. Special Agent – Johannes Bjerregaard
09. Blue Meanies – Steve Barrett
10. Asian Legends (inc. Last Ninja & Exploding Fist) – Various Artists
11. Aztec Challenge – Paul Norman



Most big-name 8-bit composers' work is now out on CD.



Rob Hubbard – Composer

Rob Hubbard, creator of some of the most loved retro videogame music of all time, takes a break from life on a cruise ship to talk to games™…

GAMES™: WHEN DID YOU FIRST BEGIN CREATING MUSIC FOR VIDEOGAMES?

Rob Hubbard: During the early Eighties.

GAMES™: DID YOU HAVE ANY FORMAL MUSIC TRAINING PRIOR TO WORKING IN THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY?

RH: I had classical piano training and went to music college.

GAMES™: WHICH PIECES OF MUSIC DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR FAVOURITES?

RH: My favourites would have to be *Sanxion* and *Kentilla*.

GAMES™: WHAT DO YOU DO FOR A LIVING NOW?

RH: I play piano and I am music director on a cruise ship at the moment.

GAMES™: THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY HAS EVOLVED A GREAT DEAL IN THE LAST 20 YEARS. HOW HAVE THE CHANGES AFFECTED YOU?

RH: I worked in the industry for 20 years and saw it develop and mature from C64 through to Xbox. The changes affected me in many ways; I started as programmer and then later ended up doing more management. I left the industry when I moved from the USA to the UK.

GAMES™: HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT REMIXES OF YOUR COMPOSITIONS COMING OUT ON CD?

RH: I think it's really cool!

GAMES™: HOW HAVE YOU BENEFITED FROM YOUR MUSIC BEING USED IN THIS WAY?

RH: Well, it brings the music to a wider, non-gamer audience.

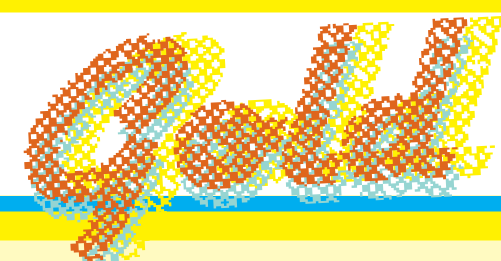
Back In Time

Released: 1998
Price: £4.99
Released in 1998, *Back In Time* was the first CD to be released on the High Technology label. Featuring some of the greatest tunes from some of the greatest C64 music composers, the remixes capture the spirit of the Eighties, and specifically the videogames we were all playing at the time. Now a bargain at just £4.99.

GAMES™ RATING: 9/10

Tracks

01. Delta 97 – Rob Hubbard
02. Rambo: First Blood Part 2 – Martin Galway
03. Sanxion – Rob Hubbard
04. Thing On A Spring – Rob Hubbard
05. Parallax – Martin Galway
06. Auf Wiedersehen Monty – Rob Hubbard and Ben Daglish
07. Mutants – Fred Gray
08. Great Giana Sisters – Chris Hüelsbeck
09. Monty On The Run 97 – Rob Hubbard
10. Arkanoid – Martin Galway
11. Ocean Loading Theme 3 – Peter Clarke
12. Wizball – Martin Galway
13. To Be On Top Intro – Chris Hüelsbeck
14. Crazy Comets 97 – Rob Hubbard
15. Delta Victory Theme – Rob Hubbard



Sidologie

Released: 2003
Price: 10.99

As far as authenticity goes, Marcel Donné's *Sidologie* is the crème de la crème. Using a Yamaha CS80 (Vangelis' synth of choice), each composition manages to capture the true spirit of the Eighties, while somehow sounding exactly the way you remember it in the game. With the Eighties making something of a piano key-tie-wearing comeback, this should be popular.

GAMES™ RATING: 8/10

Tracks

01. Sidologie Intro – Marcel Donné
02. Rambo – Martin Galway
03. Lightforce – Rob Hubbard
04. Bombo – Ben Daglish
05. Cobra – Sylvester Levay/Ben Daglish
06. Yie-Ar Kung Fu II – Martin Galway
07. Knucklebusters – Rob Hubbard
08. Wizball High Score – Martin Galway
09. Miami Vice – Martin Galway
10. Nemesis – Rob Hubbard
11. Rambo High Score – Martin Galway

Crystal Dreamscapes

Released: 2002
Price: £9.99

Not dissimilar to a CD you might pick up in your local joss stick emporium, *Crystal Dreamscapes* is an ambient chillout selection, remixed by Chris Abbot (Orpheus) and guests Alistair 'Boz,' Bowness, Carsten 'O2' Ohlsen and Marcel Donné. Although not as authentic as some C64 remix CDs, this is a great wind-down album for a quiet evening after a hard day's alien shooting.

GAMES™ RATING: 8/10

Tracks

01. Liquid Crystal (based on Chimera) – Rob Hubbard
02. Alien Dreams (original composition) – Orpheus
03. Parallax Vision (Parallax Stroll) – Martin Galway
04. The Cosmos Awakes (Miami Vice) – Martin Galway
05. Nebulae Drift (original composition) – Marcel Donné
06. Dark Before Dawn (Trap) – Ben Daglish
07. Into The Light (Wizball title theme) – Martin Galway
08. Ancestors (Zoids From BIT 3) – Larry Fast
09. Wave Ascent (LED Storm) – Tim Follin
10. Crystal Spirits (original composition) – Orpheus
11. Welcome Home (LED Storm) – Tim Follin
12. Cosmic Carousel (Ark Pandora) – Ben Daglish





▶ Live performances of C64 music are increasing, and gaining the support of the original composers (see below for proof).



GAMES™: WHAT SORT OF REACTION HAVE YOU HAD FROM THE COMPOSERS SINCE RELEASING THEIR WORK?

CA: Mostly relief that they got paid, as well as increasing amount of appreciation for the end result, and a growing willingness to come to Back in Time Live.

I'd like to put a special mention to Richard Joseph here – he's one composer who seems genuinely touched, rather than embarrassed, about the effect his work has had on people.

GAMES™: MORE IMPORTANTLY, WHAT SORT OF REACTION HAVE YOU HAD FROM LISTENERS?

CA: If they're female, a kind of strangulated desperation, followed by an intense desire to kill me (except regarding our new-age releases like *Crystal Dreamscapes* where they demand free copies for their yoga classes). Otherwise, there was the 'those sound crap, you never should have done anything at all' group, the 'I've always wanted this to happen' group and the 'Oh, right' group.

In the beginning, it was easier to categorise since there was only one product and it was that or nothing. Now there's something for everyone, but the main tunes have been done time and time again. People are less vocal these days because they take the quality for granted and they're not exactly starved of CDs.

There's even a rumbling that there are too many CDs now, though each one is the result of a creative outpouring – it's not a commercial scene in the sense that the main criteria for releasing a CD is whether it brings anything new, and whether it seems like a good idea. Perhaps a more mercenary approach would have worked better, but the price we pay for the loyalty of the C64 fans is

For anyone interested in attending BIT Live Brighton, tickets cost £5 for the daytime workshop and £10 for the evening concert and can be purchased online at www.C64Audio.com. The event takes place in The Brighton Centre on Saturday 13 September.

Instant Remedy

Released: 2002
Price: £10.99

Although the flavour of *Instant Remedy* is very much of the C64 era, the arrangements bring things up to date, proving just how timeless many videogame compositions really are. If the DJ decided to spin a couple of tracks from this album in your local nightclub, the chances are you wouldn't even realise that they're all retro tunes.

GAMES™ RATING: 8/10

Tracks

01. Last Ninja (The Palace) – Anthony Lees
02. Flimbo's Quest – Reyn Ouwehand
03. Comic Bakery – Martin Galway
04. International Karate – Rob Hubbard
05. Game On (Issue 09/89) – Markus Schneider
06. Ghosts 'N Goblins – Mark Cooksey
06. IK+ - Rob Hubbard
07. Last Ninja (The Wastelands) – Ben Daglish
08. Trolls – Adam Gilmore
09. Warriors – Thomas 'Drax' Mogenson
10. Commando (V2) – Rob Hubbard
11. West Bank (V2) – Fred Gray
12. BONUS TRACK: Last Ninja (The Wastelands) Extended Version – Ben Daglish
13. BONUS TRACK: Comic Bakery – Martin Galway
14. BONUS TRACK: Commando – Rob Hubbard

Karma 64

Released: 2002
Price: £9.99

Arranged by the same artists who worked on *Back In Time*, *Karma 64* is a much more diverse and personal album that mixes a range of instruments into some of the most memorable C64 game compositions. Highly polished, this demonstrates the excellent production quality that High Technology Publishing is capable of producing.

GAMES™ RATING: 8/10

Tracks

01. Ocean Loader 2 – Martin Galway
02. Miami Vice – Martin Galway
03. Delta Victory – Rob Hubbard
04. Wizball – Martin Galway
05. Ocean Loader 4 – Jonathan Dunn
06. Mutants – Fred Gray
07. Arkanoid – Martin Galway
08. Chimera – Rob Hubbard
09. Way Of The Exploding Fist – Neil Brennan
10. Revenge Of The Mutant Camels 2 – Ben Daglish
11. Gerry the Germ – Rob Hubbard
12. BMX Kidz – Jori Olkonnen
13. Sanxion – Rob Hubbard
14. Flimbo's Quest – Johannes Bjerregaard
15. Crazy Comets – Rob Hubbard
16. Monty On The Run – Rob Hubbard

Loading Ready Run

Released: 2001
Price: £10.99

A little different to most other retro music CDs, *Loading Ready Run* features tracks by Press Play On Tape, a rock band dedicated to playing Commodore 64 game soundtracks. With six musicians in the band, it's not surprising that the group manages to create some great sounds in a style in which the compositions wouldn't usually be played.

GAMES™ RATING: 8/10

Tracks

01. Rambo: First Blood Part II – Martin Galway
02. Ghosts 'N Goblins – Mark Cooksey
03. Warhawk – Rob Hubbard
04. Monty On The Run – Rob Hubbard
05. Beyond The Ice Palace – David Whittaker
06. Wizardry – Mike Alsop
07. Commando – Rob Hubbard
08. Thing On A Spring – Rob Hubbard
09. Aztec Challenge – Paul Norman
10. Auf Wiedersehen Monty – Rob Hubbard & Ben Daglish
11. Paperboy – Mark Cooksey & Martin Galway
12. Krakout – Ben Daglish
13. Thrust – Rob Hubbard
14. Master Of Magic – Larry Fast

that we have to act out of pure motives, and be seen to do so.

GAMES™: AS WELL AS WORKING ON CD RELEASES, YOU'VE ALSO BEEN INVOLVED WITH NUMEROUS LIVE RETRO GAMING EVENTS. HOW MANY LIVE EVENTS HAVE YOU ORGANISED AND WHAT HAVE THEY ENTAILED?

CA: I've organised five so far – four Back In Time Live events and an exhibition called 8-Bit Revolution.

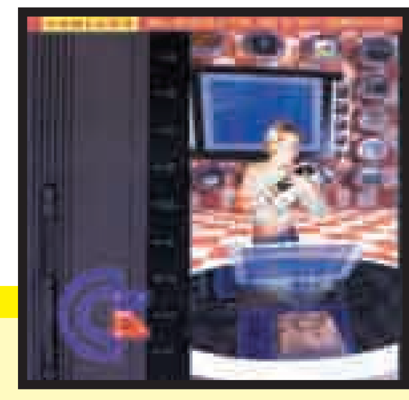
GAMES™: ANOTHER BACK IN TIME LIVE EVENT IS TO BE HELD IN BRIGHTON IN SEPTEMBER. WHAT SHOULD PARTICIPANTS EXPECT FROM THE DAY?

CA: Well, from 11am to 6pm it will be an exhibition with a tribute stand to Sensible Software and a competition area with loads of retro machines. There'll also be a remix workshop (where people can jam along with various composers on a Sidstation as well as various other synth equipment), a Llamasoft area, and an area where people can have a hands-on with current C64 equipment doing outrageous things like connecting to the Internet through broadband.

There'll be loads of competitions, prizes, freebies, and the chance to play games against their authors or musicians. Then from 7pm there'll be a rock concert, with the main attraction being Rob Hubbard playing his own tunes live. There'll also be supporting acts, and the whole thing will be properly lit and recorded for posterity (and possible DVD release!).



▶ Press Play… are a whole band, not just a man and a Moog.



Remix64

Released: 2002
Price: £10.99

Arranged by various artists, *Remix64* takes 17 C64 favourites and recreates them in the musical styles of some of the Eighties' best-known composers. Amongst the line-up are tributes to Mike Oldfield, Giorgio Moroder, The Pet Shop Boys, and even Stock, Aitken & Waterman. A great idea and one which is flawlessly realised.

GAMES™ RATING: 9/10

Tracks

01. Glider Rider – David Whittaker
02. Ark Pandora – Ben Daglish
03. Green Beret – Martin Galway
04. Human Race 4 – Rob Hubbard
05. Ocean Loader I – Martin Galway
06. Red Max – David Whittaker
07. Deliverance – Matt Gray
08. Platoon – Jonathan Dunn
09. Panther – David Whittaker
10. Defender Of The Crown – Jim Cuomo
11. Ocean Loader IV – Jonathan Dunn
12. Hollywood Poker Pro – Chris Hüelsbeck
13. Storm – David Whittaker
14. Starball – Chris Hüelsbeck
15. Hyper Aggressive – Thomas Detert
16. Thrust – Rob Hubbard
17. Nemesis The Warlock – Rob Hubbard

All these soundtracks (as well as much more specialist merchandise) are available to buy at www.C64Audio.com



▶ The lush background art was out of this world (quite literally) but it was Conrad B Hart who stole the show with his rotoscoping.

F·L·A·S·H·B·A·C·K

T·H·E Q·U·E·S·T F·O·R I·D·E·N·T·I·T·Y



IT'S LIKE PRINCE OF PERSIA, BUT WITH ALIENS – WHAT MORE COULD YOU POSSIBLY WANT FROM A GAME, EH?

Greatest RETRO Game Ever

Everyone remembers the first time they were really blown away by a game's outstanding graphics. While it might not have been the very first time for us, one of the instances that stands out most in our mind was when Delphine released *Flashback* for the Amiga. Despite being the sequel to *Another World* – a screen-by-screen adventure game that set a new standard in rotoscoped animation – *Flashback*'s style was clearly influenced more by the earlier *Prince Of Persia*. In fact, replace the alien setting with a Persian palace and the Morphs (alien invaders with the ability to imitate humans) with turban-wearing guards and it could have been the same game…

As was the case with some of Delphine's other products – *Another World* and *Cruise For A Corpse* immediately spring to mind – *Flashback* had a very simple yet compelling storyline. Although you control Conrad B Hart, you don't actually know this at the start of the game – mainly because having uncovered a conspiracy to take over the Earth, you've had your memory wiped and have been dumped in the middle of an alien jungle (hey, it happens to the best of us). It's here that the adventure to recover your mind from the Morphs, reach the alien homeworld and prevent their plans from coming to fruition begins – and while it's nowhere near as hard as its predecessor, it's still a tough (but immensely enjoyable) adventure.

While the game was highly polished in terms of background art and presentation, these weren't the things that made a lot of people's jaws hit the floor. Instead, it was the animation – using a system that Delphine had branded Cinematique (and had used for a handful of its titles prior to *Flashback*), the star of the game was most certainly Conrad himself, moving in a more lifelike way than any game character had ever done before. Thanks to Conrad having the ability to do everything the Prince could do and more besides – including forward rolls to pass through narrow areas and huge running jumps to access far-off ledges – *Flashback* far surpassed *Prince Of Persia* with regard to the realism of its lead character.

But *Flashback* didn't just boast great visuals. Thankfully, the gameplay matched the standard of the graphics by offering challenging level design, some annoyingly head-scratching puzzles (which often included working out how to take out certain enemies and move on without getting annihilated yourself) and more than a few well-presented, yet not too complicated, cut-scenes to keep the story moving along. It was proof that while presentation was important, a game didn't have to be bogged down with complicated controls and overly important plot threads to be compelling – an art that appears to have been lost somewhat in the mire of today's industry.

If only the rumours of *Flashback* being remade for the GBA were true.

Format(s): **Amiga (first), PC, Mac, SNES, Mega Drive, 3D0, CD-i, SEGA MegaCD, Jaguar**
Publisher: **US Gold/Mindscape**
Developer: **Delphine**
Price: **£Varies**
Release date: **1992**

▶ Remind you of anyone? Conrad's movement was very like the Prince of Persia's.

BEFORE & AFTER

Flashback **is the second game in a trilogy and the most accomplished of the three titles. But there's no doubt that *Another World* (the game that, with *Prince Of Persia*, brought rotoscoping to the fore of games animation) was a decent experience – even if it did feature numerous *Dragon's Lair*-style 'do this or die' segments and was too short and stupidly hard. Sadly, the same can't be said for the third game, *Fade To Black*. Although the move into 3D was to be expected, it made the game less playable and left fans disappointed.**



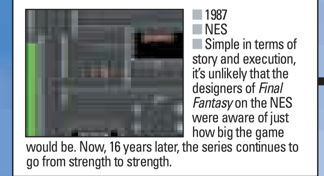
Comix Zone (Mega Drive) SEGA, 1995 – American advertisement



FINAL FANTASY FAMILY TREE

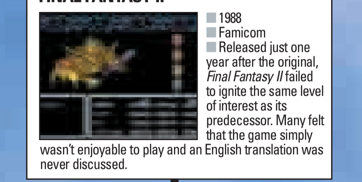
In 1987, Squaresoft was apparently on its last legs. At the same time, Enix's *Dragon Quest* was proving extremely popular. Mimicking what Enix had achieved, Squaresoft poured its resources into one last 'make or break' title – *Final Fantasy*…

FINAL FANTASY



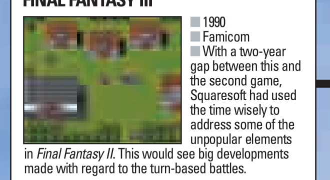
- 1987
- NES
- Simple in terms of story and execution, it's unlikely that the designers of *Final Fantasy* on the NES were aware of just how big the game would be. Now, 16 years later, the series continues to go from strength to strength.

FINAL FANTASY II



- 1988
- Famicom
- Released just one year after the original, *Final Fantasy II* failed to ignite the same level of interest as its predecessor. Many felt that the game simply wasn't enjoyable to play and an English translation was never discussed.

FINAL FANTASY III



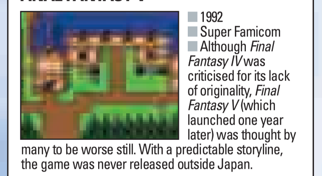
- 1990
- Famicom
- With a two-year gap between this and the second game, Squaresoft had used the time wisely to address some of the unpopular elements in *Final Fantasy II*. This would see big developments made with regard to the turn-based battles.

FINAL FANTASY IV



- 1991
- SNES
- Here's where it starts to get confusing. As only one NES *Final Fantasy* game had been released in the West, *Final Fantasy IV* was known as *Final Fantasy II* in America. Although unoriginal, this was still a decent game.

FINAL FANTASY V



- 1992
- Super Famicom
- Although *Final Fantasy IV* was criticised for its lack of originality, *Final Fantasy V* (which launched one year later) was thought by many to be worse still. With a predictable storyline, the game was never released outside Japan.

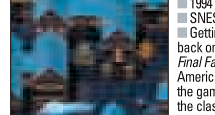
MYSTIC QUEST

- 1992
- SNES
- Going back to basics, *Mystic Quest* was seen as an RPG for beginners, making it too simple for most *Final Fantasy* fans. Released in America in place of *Final Fantasy V*, the game later launched in Japan as *Final Fantasy USA: Mystic Quest*.

FINAL FANTASY I + II

- 1994
- Famicom
- Re-released to coincide with the launch of a new, sleeker Famicom, a single cartridge housed *Final Fantasy* and *Final Fantasy II*. Despite the enormous number of Famicoms already sold, over a million units were shifted.

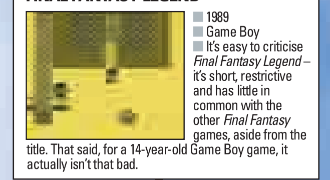
FINAL FANTASY VI



- 1994
- SNES
- Getting the series back on track again, *Final Fantasy VI* (*III* in America) is seen as the game that linked the classic hand-drawn titles with the pre-rendered *Final Fantasy VII* on PSone. This title was darker and more mature than its predecessors.

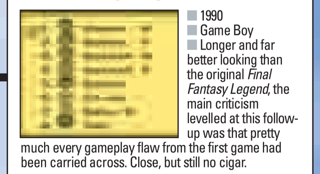
HANDHELDS

FINAL FANTASY LEGEND



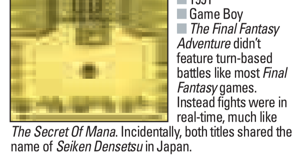
- 1989
- Game Boy
- It's easy to criticise *Final Fantasy Legend* – it's short, restrictive and has little in common with the other *Final Fantasy* games, aside from the title. That said, for a 14-year-old Game Boy game, it actually isn't that bad.

FINAL FANTASY LEGEND II



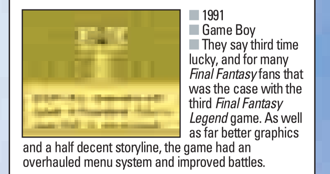
- 1990
- Game Boy
- Longer and far better looking than the original *Final Fantasy Legend*, the main criticism levelled at this follow-up was that pretty much every gameplay flaw from the first game had been carried across. Close, but still no cigar.

THE FINAL FANTASY ADVENTURE



- 1991
- Game Boy
- *The Final Fantasy Adventure* didn't feature turn-based battles like most *Final Fantasy* games. Instead fights were in real-time, much like *The Secret Of Mana*. Incidentally, both titles shared the name of *Seiken Densetsu* in Japan.

FINAL FANTASY LEGEND III



- 1991
- Game Boy
- They say third time lucky, and for many *Final Fantasy* fans that was the case with the third *Final Fantasy Legend* game. As well as far better graphics and a half decent storyline, the game had an overhauled menu system and improved battles.

HANDHELD REMAKES

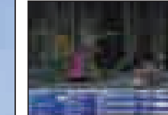
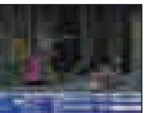
SPIN-OFFS

CHOCOBO DUNGEON



- 1997
- PSone
- Concentrating on the ostrich-like Chocobos that had featured in the *Final Fantasy* series, *Chocobo Dungeon* was an RPG with cutesy versions of some of the favourite *Final Fantasy* characters. A follow-up was released a year later.

FINAL FANTASY VII

- 1997
- PSone/PC
- As one of the titles that helped Sony to dominate the market, *Final Fantasy VII* was massively popular all around the world with over three million units shifted in Japan alone. A perfect blend of imagination and technology, the game fully deserved its success.

VARIATIONS

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS



- 1997
- PSone
- Stepping away from the usual *Final Fantasy* formula, *Tactics* omitted the dramatic cut-scenes and storyline in favour of level-based battles that took place on abstract 3D battlegrounds. A GBA update is expected later this year.

REMAKES

EHRGEIZ

- 1998
- Arcade/PSone
- Created by Dream Factory (*The Bouncer*, *Kakuto Chojin*), *Ehrgeiz* was one of the first 3D fighting games to feature interactive environments. The game also featured Cloud from *Final Fantasy VII*, giving it a popularity boost.

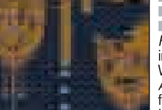
CHOCOBO RACING

- 1999
- PSone
- Following on from the success of *Super Mario Kart* and *Mario Kart 64*, *Chocobo Racing* was nothing more than a cutesy kart racing game. That said, it did what it did very well and was subsequently popular with *Final Fantasy* fans.

FINAL FANTASY VIII

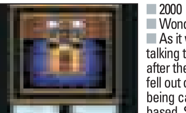
- 1999
- PSone/PC
- Taking a different approach from *Final Fantasy VII*, *Final Fantasy VIII* threw out the super-deformed Japanese characters in favour of realism. Despite some incredible graphic effects, many fans were disappointed by the game's linearity.

FINAL FANTASY ANTHOLOGY



- 1999
- PSone
- Including *Final Fantasy IV*, *V* and *VI* in Japan, the Western release of *Anthology* only featured *V* and *VI*. However, *VI* was later released as a standalone game, coming complete with a playable demo of *Final Fantasy X*.

FINAL FANTASY




- 2000
- WonderSwan Color
- As it was still not talking to Nintendo after the companies fell out over the N64 being cartridge-based, Squaresoft began releasing updates of its *Final Fantasy* games on Bandai's WonderSwan handheld in 2000.

ONLINE

FINAL FANTASY IX

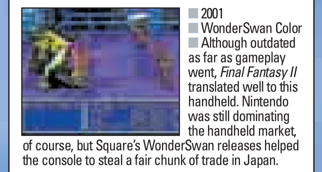
- 2000
- PSone
- While initially looking closer to *VII* than *VIII*, *Final Fantasy IX* once again disappointed many fans due to its guided character upgrade system. Whereas *VII* allowed players to tailor their characters' abilities, it was more structured here.

FINAL FANTASY CHRONICLES



- 2001
- PSone
- Featuring both *Final Fantasy IV* and *Chrono Trigger*, *Final Fantasy Chronicles* included brand new FMV cut-scenes. Sadly, despite being pencilled in for release in Europe two years ago, the game has disappeared from Sony's schedule.

FINAL FANTASY II WSC



- 2001
- WonderSwan Color
- Although outdated as far as gameplay went, *Final Fantasy II* translated well to this handheld. Nintendo was still dominating the handheld market, of course, but Square's WonderSwan releases helped the console to steal a fair chunk of trade in Japan.

FINAL FANTASY XI

- 2002
- PS2
- Greatly changing the direction of the series, *Final Fantasy XI* was among the first PS2 online games in Japan. The game required an additional hard drive to work, though an updated standalone version is expected in the West this year.

FINAL FANTASY X

- 2001
- PS2
- Squaresoft had a difficult task bringing *Final Fantasy* to PS2. The machine was notoriously difficult to program for, and matching the quality of the graphics demos it had prepared for Sony prior to launch was something it only just managed to pull off.

KINGDOM HEARTS

- 2002
- PS2
- As well as featuring plenty of Walt Disney characters, *Kingdom Hearts* also included a handful of *Final Fantasy* favourites. Squall, Yuffie and Aeris all featured early on, while a few more diverse characters could be found later.

FINAL FANTASY ORIGINS

- 2002
- PSone
- Similar in execution to *Final Fantasy Chronicles*, *Origins* featured both *Final Fantasy* and *Final Fantasy II*, along with a selection of flashy FMV sequences. Unlike *Chronicles*, however, *Origins* actually made it to European game stores.

FINAL FANTASY III + IV

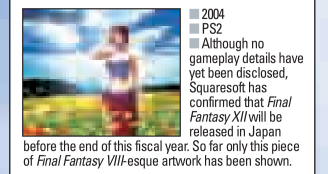
- 2002
- WonderSwan Color
- Although it would have been more profitable for Squaresoft to settle its differences with Nintendo and release games for GBA, the company continued to support the WonderSwan, despite an ever-decreasing market share.

FINAL FANTASY XI GIRADE NO GENEI



- 2003
- PS2
- *Girade no Genei* was merely an update disc offering Japanese gamers new features to play within *Final Fantasy XI*. Although nothing has been confirmed, we expect the upgrades to be included in the European version of *FFXI*.

FINAL FANTASY XII



- 2004
- PS2
- Although no gameplay details have yet been disclosed, Squaresoft has confirmed that *Final Fantasy XII* will be released in Japan before the end of this fiscal year. So far only this piece of *Final Fantasy VIII*-esque artwork has been shown.

FINAL FANTASY X-2

- 2003
- PS2
- While each game in the *Final Fantasy* series has featured new characters and locations, *Final Fantasy X-2* follows *Final Fantasy X*. This time Yuna is the main character and the game looks to include more action-based elements than before.

FINAL FANTASY CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

- 2003
- GameCube
- Developed by a new company called Game Designers Studio, *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* has very little in common with the rest of the series. Interestingly, the game will make use of GC and GBA link-up for co-operative four-player action.

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE

- 2003
- GBA
- After climbing into bed with Sony in the mid-Nineties, it's taken a long time for Squaresoft to begin working with Nintendo again. It will be interesting to see how well this six-year-old PSone game translates to the Game Boy Advance.



GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT...

SCUD RACE

GAMES THAT NEVER QUITE MADE IT...

Some games come out in Japan but never get converted to English, while others get cancelled before they even make it out of production. And some, like SEGA's Scud Race, get released in the arcade but never make it to home consoles...



Title: **Scud Race**
Developer: **SEGA AM2**
Format: **Model 3 1.5 Arcade Board**
Release date: **1996**

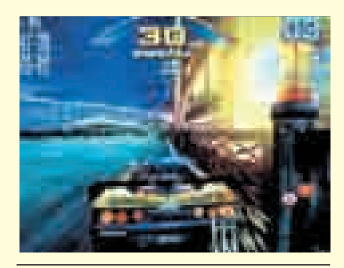
When SEGA's Model 2 arcade board was released back in 1993, it was at the pinnacle of 3D graphics technology. Capable of processing 300,000 polygons per second and with the ability to display plenty of textures, games such as *Daytona USA* and *Virtua Fighter 2* were all possible at a resolution of 496 x 384. But by 1996 the system was looking dated. Other arcade developers' projects were approaching the level of graphical detail of SEGA games and a number of decent SEGA Saturn Model 2 conversions – *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Virtua Cop* and *SEGA Rally* – had already been released. So to stay ahead of the crowd, SEGA launched a new system – Model 3.

Using a twin graphics chip set-up designed by Lockheed Martin, Model 3 was incredibly powerful. Sadly, it was also expensive to make and with a main processor that ran at just 66MHz there were limitations with regards to the amount of data that could be handled at one time. These limitations had to be taken into account when SEGA developed *Virtua Fighter 3*. However, upon realising that Model 3 was capable of much more if a faster main processor was used with the Lockheed Martin chips, SEGA modified the technology for its second Model 3 game, *Scud Race* (aka *SEGA Super GT*).

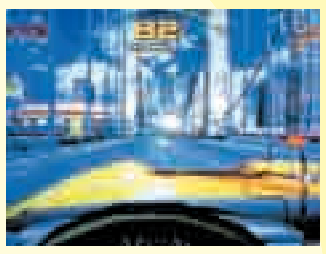
With an extra 34MHz of processing power, *Scud Race* was a gorgeous game. More of a *Daytona* spin-off than anything else, the game had four varied tracks that took the player through built-up cities, Roman villages and lush countryside. There was also a choice of four flash sports cars – the Ferrari F40, Dodge Viper, Porsche 911, and McLaren F1 – all showing a competent, if exaggerated example of real-life car handling.

So why did *Scud Race* never get released in the home? Well, there are numerous reasons – some that SEGA has admitted to and others that are purely speculation. The most obvious is that the Saturn (which was SEGA's console at the time) simply couldn't produce anywhere near the level of graphical detail of the arcade game. Of course, the Dreamcast was released in Japan just two years later, and despite rumours that the game was running in all its glory behind closed doors at SEGA of Japan, nothing was ever released. SEGA's excuse was that the Dreamcast was a new start for the company and that it was focussing on new, exclusive titles – though that didn't stop it from launching the system with *Virtua Fighter 3*. Judging by the poor quality of Dreamcast *SEGA Rally 2*, we suspect that claims of *Scud Race* running perfectly on the hardware prior to launch were bogus.

So, will we ever see a home translation of *Scud Race*? Well, unless SEGA decides to release the game on a compilation disc it looks like the only way *Scud Race* will appear in the home is via emulation – and it's likely to be a good few years before that happens.



▲ A new chip-set created some superb graphics.



▲ Sadly, the chances of playing this at home are slim.

LAST MONTH'S SEGA SATURN SCREENSHOTS

Trouble remembering names, faces? At least you won't forget what last month's screenshots were...

FIRST ROW
Galaxy Fight
Street Fighter The Movie
Virtua Fighter
The King Of Fighters 96
Metal Black
Virtua Fighter Remix
X-Men: Children Of The Atom
Night Warriors
Pocket Fighter

SECOND ROW
Shining Force
Parodius: Forever With Me
Daytona USA
Sonic Jam
Myst
World Soccer '97
Samurai Spirits 4
Twinkle Star Sprites
Dead Or Alive
Virtua Fighter 2

THIRD ROW
Blazing Tornado
Sexy Parodius
Marvel Super Heroes
Street Fighter Alpha
Virtua Cop
ThunderForce AC
X-Men Vs. Street Fighter
Panzer Dragoon
Strikers 1945
Last Bronx

FOURTH ROW
Samurai Spirits 3
Exhumed
Primal Rage
Alien Trilogy
Virtual Hydlide
Wonder 3
Astal
SEGA Rally Championship
Elevator Action Returns
Radiant Silvergun

FIFTH ROW
The King Of Fighters 97
Shinobi X
Guardian Heroes
Vampire Savior
Panzer Dragoon Zwei
In The Hunt
Virtual On
Fatal Fury 3
Scorcher
Virtua Racing

SIXTH ROW
Real Bout Fatal Fury Special
Athlete kings
Nights: Into Dreams
Waku Waku 7
Super Puzzle Fighter
Shining Wisdom
Cyberbots
Sonic 3D Blast
Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night
Manx TT

SEVENTH ROW
Layer Section
Saturn Bomberman
Street Fighter Alpha 2
Dungeons & Dragons
Virtua Fighter Kids
Street Fighter Collection
Marvel Super Heroes Vs. Street Fighter
Panzer Dragoon Saga
Real Bout Fatal Fury
Street Fighter Collection (disc 2)

EIGHTH ROW
Clockwork Knight 2
SEGA Ages
The King Of Fighters 95
Titan Wars
Parodius
Virtua Cop 2
Sonic R
Grandia
Metal Slug
Street Fighter Alpha 3



▲ The many faces of the kid they call Chameleon. Who are 'they'? Dunno…

GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT…

KID CHAMELEON

Looking at the Mega Drive back catalogue, it's easy to forget just how many great games there were. Aside from all the *Sonics*, *FIFAs* and *PGA Golfs*, the system was home to beautifully crafted adventure games like *Quackshot: Starring Donald Duck*, and *Castle Of Illusion: Starring Mickey Mouse*. Of course, many people remember these titles once prompted, though fewer are likely to recall *Kid Chameleon*.

Developed by SEGA, this atmospheric platform adventure told the tale of a mysterious amusement machine that imprisoned anyone who played it. Entitled *Wild Side*, this fantasy arcade game was said to use holograms to create an alternative reality, though the limited power of the Mega Drive meant that such imagery could only be represented by a simple *Matrix*-like grid that replaced the scenery at the end of each level.

Of course, every adventure game needs a hero and the central character with the difficult task of destroying the big boss, known only as Heady Metal, was Kid Chameleon. Wearing blue jeans, a white T-shirt and a pair of shades, he was certainly one cool dude… well, cool in a sort of Eighties *Karate Kid* kind of way.

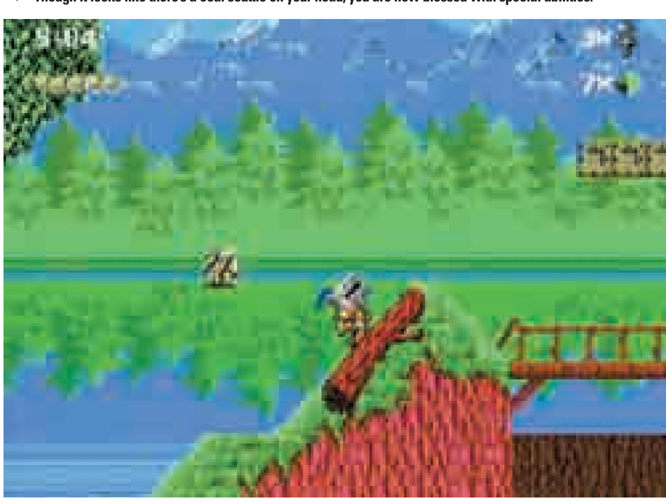
Once into the first level however, he didn't look like an Eighties throwback for all that long, as different headgear would soon morph him into a more effective fighting machine, hence the name Kid Chameleon. These included an iron mask for climbing walls, a spiked helmet for crashing through walls, and a Samurai headdress, complete with sword. Diamonds could also be collected to power special moves, from invincibility through to more unusual ideas, such as the ability to slow down all on-screen enemies.

Aside from these unique touches though, much of the rest of the game was a generic platform affair that involved jumping over gaps and stomping on enemies' heads. It even included all the regular locations – the first area was reminiscent of Green Hill Zone from *Sonic*, while later levels featured caves, lava and a beach. On top of that it didn't even look that special; sprites were generally rather small, and the predictable scenery had a tendency to appear rough and grainy.

Despite its shortcomings, *Kid Chameleon* had a strangely unsettling atmosphere which made the game seem quite unlike anything else. It was also huge, spanning more than 70 levels, so there was certainly plenty to keep you going. Best of all, you can pick it up for less than a fiver these days. Which is always nice.

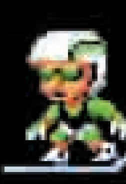
Presentation	75%
Graphics	78%
Playability	85%
Longevity	92%
OVERALL	85%

▼ Though it looks like there's a coal scuttle on your head, you are now blessed with special abilities.



Hat Tricks

Here's Kid Chameleon's complete list of hats and headdresses



Type: Iron Knight – a flat-topped helmet
Special Power: Allows you to climb walls
Diamond Power 01: Circle Of Doom (requires 20 diamonds)
Diamond Power 02: Extra Hit Point (requires 50 diamonds)

Type: Red Stealth – a samurai helmet
Special Power: Arms you with a sword
Diamond Power 01: Samurai Haze (requires 20 diamonds)
Diamond Power 02: Death Snake (requires 50 diamonds)

Type: Berzerker – a metal helmet with spikes on the top
Special Power: Allows you to smash through certain walls
Diamond Power 01: Invulnerability (requires 20 diamonds)
Diamond Power 02: Wall Of Death (requires 50 diamonds)

Type: Maniaxe – a hockey mask
Special Power: Allows you to throw axes
Diamond Power 01: Circle Of Death (requires 20 diamonds)
Diamond Power 02: Extra Life (requires 50 diamonds)

Type: Juggernaut – a samurai helmet with a skull mask
Special Power: Arms you with a tank that fires skulls
Diamond Power: Five-Way Shot (requires five diamonds)

Type: Micromax – a fly mask
Special Power: Lets you stick to walls
Diamond Power 01: Mini-Snake (requires 20 diamonds)
Diamond Power 02: Swift Mini Snake (requires 50 diamonds)

Type: Eyeclops – a green visored helmet
Special Power: Reveals hidden blocks
Diamond Power 01: Fatal Beam (requires two diamonds)

Type: Skycutter – a skateboard helmet
Special Power: Lets you fly upside down
Diamond Power 01: Invulnerability (requires 20 diamonds)
Diamond Power 02: Death Snake (requires 50 diamonds)

Type: Cyclone – a helmet with wings
Special Power: Allows you to fly
Diamond Power 01: Slashing Rain (requires 20 diamonds)
Diamond Power 02: Tracking Rain (requires 50 diamonds)





GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Saga*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: Worldwide
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil, CGI



GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: In Japan
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil



GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: In Japan
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, acrylic paint

The Gallery

Like the Castlevania series, Panzer Dragoon has always been a firm favourite with hard-core gamers, not just for the wonderful gameplay but also because of the stunning artwork...

When *Panzer Dragoon* arrived on the Saturn in 1995, many were amazed at just how much beautiful imagery had been sculpted into one game. With a gentle, natural colour palette and clever use of the Saturn's complex innards to create crisply textured environments, what SEGA's Team Andromeda had achieved was nothing short of breathtaking. This level of creativity ran right through the game – British composer Richard Jacques (of *Head Hunter* and *Jet Set Radio* fame) commented on how moved he was when he first heard the orchestral soundtrack.

In-game creativity aside, *Panzer Dragoon* was one of those rare games with cover art and promotional illustrations that were just as creative as the game itself. Based on the work of French comic-book artist, Moebius, the main imagery for the original game leaned towards a comic style while maintaining a sense of fantasy and adventure. Interestingly, the style was more reminiscent of Western art rather than Japanese, though later works in the series had a far more oriental flavour. Much of the artwork used for the second game, for example, softened the colour palette to pale greens and browns, favouring a sense of lone, graceful elevation rather than action-packed battle scenes. However, it was the third game that really took videogame artistic creation to new levels…

By the time the acclaimed RPG *Panzer Dragoon Saga* arrived in 1998, the Saturn was all but washed up. Even so, Team Andromeda had

GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: Worldwide
MEDIA: Watercolour paint

GAME: *Panzer Dragoon*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: In Japan
MEDIA: Watercolour pencil

GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Zwei*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: In America
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, acrylic paint, watercolour pencil, CGI

Maybe the pen isn't so mighty…

Although a number of beautiful, hand-drawn illustrations were prepared for SEGA's latest *Panzer Dragoon* game, the company used more modern-looking CGI as cover art. Presumably, this was to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, though sales figures showed that the choice actually made very little difference.



▲ The traditional artwork produced for *Panzer Dragoon Orta* proved that SEGA's artists were still on top form.



▲ Despite some very lovely hand-drawn artwork being available, SEGA used CGI on the *PDO* box.



GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Saga*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: In Japan
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil



GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Saga*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: In Japan
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil



GAME: *Panzer Dragoon Saga*
FORMAT: Saturn
USED: Worldwide
MEDIA: Watercolour paint, watercolour pencil

continued to pour innovative ideas into the game, as had the artists responsible for the promotional materials. Featuring richer, warmer colours than the previous two games, *Saga* had more of a focus on emotion than anything else. Featuring close-ups of the main characters' faces, much of the artwork hinted at sadness and oppression, which were two key themes of the in-game story. Seeing as the game included towns and cities that were explored on foot, as well as the usual flight sections, the artists were given the freedom to illustrate the game in ways that wouldn't have really worked before.

Of course, times change and by the time *Panzer Dragoon Orta* arrived in Japan late last year, it wasn't really feasible for SEGA to use traditional hand-painted artwork on the cover. With computer generated imagery (CGI) now widespread, the company was forced to update *Panzer Dragoon*'s image, though judging by the less than stellar sales figures, doing so failed to increase casual interest in the product. However, though CGI was used for the box, a number of traditional compositions were created. A pencil and watercolour image of heroine Orta, for example, was produced, though hardly ever used for promotional purposes. Thanks to **games™**, this hand-drawn *Orta* artwork, along with many other under-used *Panzer Dragoon* illustrations, is now available for your viewing pleasure…

The French connection

Listed in the credits of the original* Panzer Dragoon *game is an artist with the bizarre name of Moebius. But who is this elusive individual?

Born in Paris in 1938 under the name of Jean Giraud, Moebius began creating comic strips at the tender age of 18. Throughout the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies he worked on numerous projects, the most popular being Blueberry. Interestingly, the Blueberry strip was still running during the Nineties, though it's unclear whether Giraud was involved with project at that time. But this still doesn't explain why Moebius was credited in *Panzer Dragoon*. Unfortunately, we're still none the wiser as to how this comic artist was involved with SEGA's creation. The game credited him with 'Image Illustrations', though our research would suggest that Ryuichiro Kutsuzawa was responsible for producing the *Panzer Dragoon* artwork. Could it be, then, that Moebius' work was purely used as inspiration by Kutsuzawa-san, or did he actually create specific *Panzer Dragoon* pieces himself? Answers to the usual address…





C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

B·U·Y·E·R·S G·U·I·D·E Q·U·I·C·K R·E·F·E·R·E·N·C·E

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places – charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start. Before you do that, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

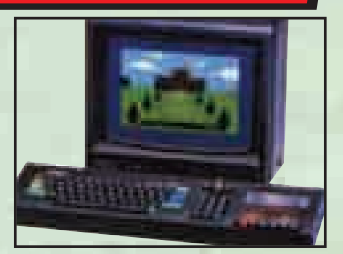
SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system) (prices for multi-slots are higher)	£70
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- NAME: Amstrad CPC 464
- PRICE: £15-25 (£20-30 colour monitor)
- THREE OF THE BEST:
  - *Target Renegade* (est. price £2)
  - *Barbarian* (est. price £2)
  - *Driller* (est. price £2.50)
- Gone but not forgotten, the 464 is a great investment if you want to play a host of classic titles. We recommend you track down a colour version.

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SELLING

To sell items on gBay, simply list the following details in an email to: gbay@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on gBay, along with your region in the UK.

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- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

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If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs on a first come, first served basis

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Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out gBay, the most authentic retro sales column in the world!

FOR SALE

LOT 11 – *Jet Pac* for Spectrum. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £1 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 12 – *Lord Of The Rings* for Spectrum. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £2.50 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 13 – *Amstrad GX4000 console*, two control pads, *Burnin' Rubber* game, PSU & RF lead. Boxed with instructions and all documents, near mint condition. £40 including p+p. Oxon

LOT 14 – *Ecco The Dolphin* (UK version) for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £4 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 15 – *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament* (UK version) for Mega Drive. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £4 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 17 – *Neo-Geo Pocket Color* (blue camouflage) with *Puzzle Bobble*. Boxed with instructions, excellent condition, barely used. £50. Newcastle Upon Tyne

LOT 18 – *Chuckie Egg 2* for C64. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £1 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 19 – *Ghostbusters* for Commodore 64. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £2 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks



LOT 20 – *Jet Set Willy* for Commodore 64. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 21 – *Golden Axe II* for SEGA Mega Drive (UK version). Boxed with instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 22 – *Mega Bomberman* for Mega Drive (UK version). Boxed with instructions, good condition. £4 plus p+p, or buyer collects. North Yorks

LOT 23 – *Ikaruga* for SEGA Dreamcast (Jap version). Brand new and sealed. £50, including p+p. London

LOT 24 – Atari 2600 (wood effect) plus two paddles in carry case. Includes 39 games in plastic bookcases, Trackball, two additional paddles, Quickshot joystick, two classic joysticks, video touch pad and two keyboard controllers plus game manuals. Console needs attention. £80. Birmingham

LOT 25 – *Neo-Geo Pocket Color* and six games including *Neo Turfmasters*, *Neo World Cup* and *Fatal Fury*. All boxed as new. £80, including p+p. Merseyside

WANTED

WANTED 07 – *King Of Fighters '98* (English) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 08 – *King Of Fighters 2000* (English) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and complete with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 09 – *Last Resort* for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 10 – *Miracle Piano* teaching cartridge for NES (UK version). Must be in good working order. Suffolk

WANTED 11 – *Dragon(s) Crystal* for SEGA Game Gear. Preferably with box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 12 – *Azure Dreams* for Sony PSone. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 13 – *Vandal Hearts* for Sony Playstation. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 14 – *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for SEGA Saturn. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 15 – *Panzer Dragoon Mini* for SEGA Game Gear. Preferably with box and instructions. Poole

WANTED 16 – *Bomberman* compatible Multi-tap for Mega Drive. Bournemouth

WANTED 17 – C64 games. Anything considered. Liverpool

WANTED 18 – *Chrono Trigger* for Super Nintendo. Preferably with box and instructions. Will pay up to £70. Londonderry, NI

WANTED 19 – WonderSwan dating games. Must be in good condition with boxes and instructions. Surrey

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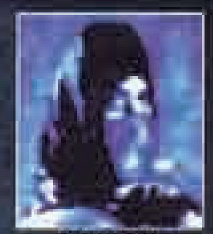
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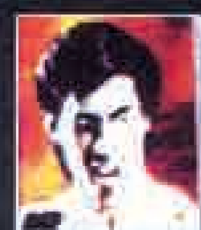
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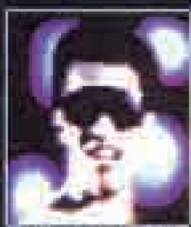
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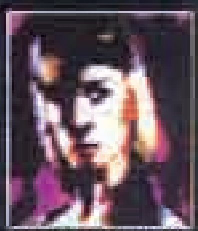
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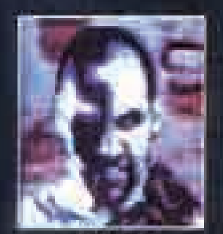




















MORTAL KOMBAT (various home systems) Midway, 1993


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.

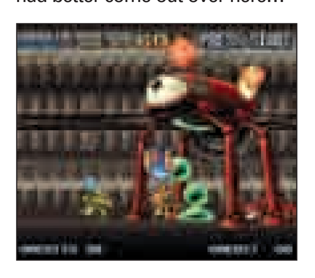


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 2	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Dark Chronicle IMPORT	Sony	In-House
8	Rez	SEGA	UGA
9	Amplitude IMPORT	Sony	Harmonix
10	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
11	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House
12	Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House
13	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
14	Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	In-House
15	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
16	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
17	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
18	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Tecmo
19	Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	SEGA	AM2
20	Kingdom Hearts	SCEE	Squaresoft

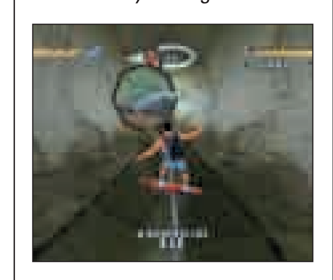
VIEWPOINT
METAL SLUG 3

A side-scrolling shoot-'em-up with cartoon-styled graphics might not sound like much, but then you've obviously never experienced the *Metal Slug* series – probably the purest examples of gameplay we've seen in a very long time. It had better come out over here…



VIEWPOINT
WAKEBOARDING UNLEASHED

No, it's not as good as *THPS4* – but then, when you're pulling off stunts off the back of a boat at 60mph, who cares? Shaba's extreme game is the perfect thing for anyone bored of waiting for the next *Tony Hawk* game.



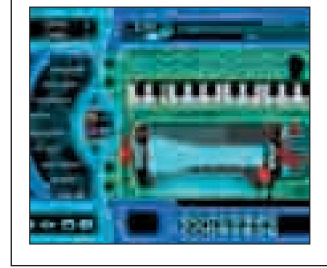
VIEWPOINT
AMPLITUDE

Either you've got the skill to play *Amplitude* or you haven't – according to those in the office who can breeze through the top difficulty with one eye shut, it's something you're born with. Of course, if they let us have a go, we'd soon prove otherwise…

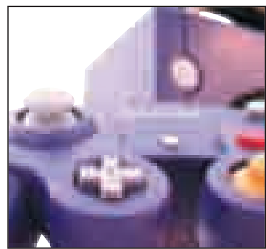


VIEWPOINT
MUSIC 3000

Of course, those of you who prefer something a bit more technical to the 'hit the targets' formula of *Amplitude* will probably have picked up Jester's top-notch music creator by now. Not surprisingly, it's the best of its kind – not just on the PS2, but anywhere. Really.













GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. Admittedly, third-party support is rapidly dwindling, but you only have to look at the first-party releases to appreciate the quality gaming on offer – Nintendo still makes some of the finest games you'll ever play and missing out on them isn't an option.



TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title		Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime		Nintendo	In-House
2	The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker		Nintendo	In-House
3	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution	IMPORT	Konami	In-House
4	Super Monkey Ball 2		SEGA	Amusement Vision
5	TimeSplitters 2		Eidos	Free Radical
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact		Acclaim	In-House
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4		Activision	Neversoft
8	Ikaruga		Treasure	In-House
9	Super Mario Sunshine		Nintendo	In-House
10	Eternal Darkness		Nintendo	Silicon Knights
11	Soul Calibur II	IMPORT	Namco	In-House
12	Resident Evil		Capcom	In-House
13	Resident Evil Zero		Capcom	In-House
14	Mario Party 4		Nintendo	Hudson
15	Viewtiful Joe	IMPORT	Capcom	In-House
16	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin		Eidos	Io Interactive
17	Skies Of Arcadia Legends		SEGA	Overworks
18	Splinter Cell		Ubi Soft	In-House
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader		Activision	Factor 5
20	Animal Crossing	IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House

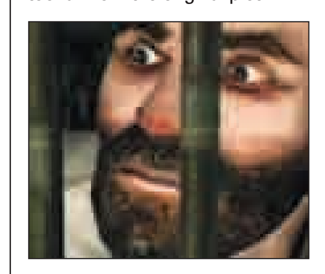
VIEWPOINT
IKARUGA

Still one of the hardest shoot-'em-ups we've ever played (with the exception of *Dodonpachi Dai-Ou-Jou* perhaps), and yet it's only been available to the majority of gamers for a very short while. All the more reason to nip out now and pick up a copy, eh?



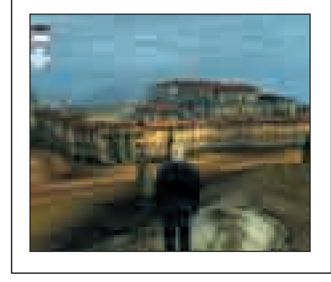
VIEWPOINT
ETERNAL DARKNESS

With Hollywood currently going through a phase of buying up every licence that may be decent enough to spawn a movie, it's good to know that in *Eternal Darkness* they've picked a winner. At least they don't have to stray too far from the original plot…



VIEWPOINT
HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

Well, it's about bloody time too. Although Eidos has spent absolutely ages getting around to releasing the GameCube version of Io's great assassin adventure, at least it's still as good as we remember it oh-so-long ago.



VIEWPOINT
SKIES OF ARCADIA LEGENDS

Although the GameCube is fairly light on proper RPG titles at the moment, SEGA's epic pirate-based adventure still stands out as one that must be owned simply for the quality of the product. If only it looked a little nicer…



ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

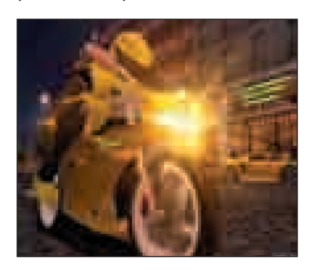
Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.



TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
6	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
7	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
8	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
9	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios
10	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
11	Soul Calibur II IMPORT	Namco	In-House
12	Moto GP	THQ	Climax
13	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
14	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
15	Quantum Redshift	Microsoft	Curly Monsters
16	Colin McRae Rally 3	CodeMasters	In-House
17	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games
18	Tiger Woods 2003	EA	In-House
19	Buffy The Vampire Slayer	EA	In-House
20	Return To Castle Wolfenstein: Tides Of War	Activision	id Software

VIEWPOINT
MIDNIGHT CLUB II
While we still prefer a good blast of *Burnout 2* to satisfy our arcade racing thrills, we have to admit that the lure of *Midnight Club II*'s Xbox Live options has seen us playing long into the early hours of the morning. Well worth a go if you're a lucky broadband owner.



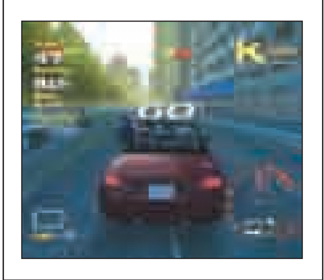
VIEWPOINT
F1 CAREER CHALLENGE
While it might not be that different from previous incarnations (not that we expected it to be, of course), it at least proves that EA knows what it's doing when it comes to realistic sports titles. Plus it's the only half-decent F1 game on the market…



VIEWPOINT
JET SET RADIO FUTURE
Playing the new version of *Jet Set Radio* on the GBA has made us hanker for a bit of the updated Xbox version, so we dug it out for another quick bash. The verdict? It's still a really great game, even if it did come out well over a year ago now.



VIEWPOINT
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING
With the extremely gorgeous-looking sequel only a few months away, it looks like now's the last chance you'll have to enjoy the first game before all your attention gets diverted elsewhere – and to miss out would be such a shame.









GBA

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely new SP model is available now.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Advance Wars 2 IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House
2	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
3	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
4	Golden Sun: The Lost Age IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot
5	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
6	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
7	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
8	Pokémon Ruby and Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
9	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish

VIEWPOINT

ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING

What? Even after we insisted you bought this one on import last issue, you still haven't got it? Hang your head in shame…



VIEWPOINT

YU-GI-OH! STAIRWAY TO THE DESTINED DUEL

Yes, okay, so you might not think it's your cup of tea, being based on a kids' cartoon and all that. Believe us though, it's so damn addictive…



PC

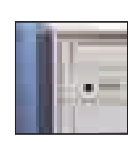
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it is perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
2	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Sports Interactive
3	Operation: Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
4	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
5	Freelancer	Microsoft	Digital Anvil
6	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Age Of Mythology	Microsoft	Ensemble Studios
9	Day Of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software
10	Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts

VIEWPOINT

DAY OF DEFEAT

Damn that ever-popular *Half-Life* engine – is there no stopping it? It would seem not, judging by how popular Activision's war-based take on it has been with us.



VIEWPOINT

RISE OF NATIONS

If it's depth you want from your RTS games, then you really can't go wrong with Microsoft's hefty offering; especially since it caters both for novices and experts.



PERIPHERALS

THEY MAY NOT BE EVERYONE'S CUP OF TEA, BUT EACH CONSOLE HAS ITS OWN MUST-HAVE PERIPHERALS – THOSE LITTLE EXTRAS THAT MAKE THE GAMING EXPERIENCE ALL THE MORE PLEASURABLE. CAN YOU KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THESE?

MEGAWORKS 5.1 550

DETAILS

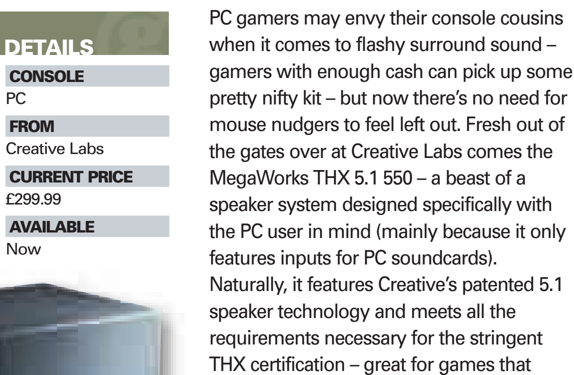
CONSOLE
PC

FROM
Creative Labs

CURRENT PRICE
£299.99

AVAILABLE
Now

PC gamers may envy their console cousins when it comes to flashy surround sound – gamers with enough cash can pick up some pretty nifty kit – but now there's no need for mouse nudgers to feel left out. Fresh out of the gates over at Creative Labs comes the MegaWorks THX 5.1 550 – a beast of a speaker system designed specifically with the PC user in mind (mainly because it only features inputs for PC soundcards). Naturally, it features Creative's patented 5.1 speaker technology and meets all the requirements necessary for the stringent THX certification – great for games that support it – as well as coming with a wired remote with headphone jack for private listening and even the ability to plug in an auxiliary device should you need to. And with that sort of quality at this low price the console gamers will be getting jealous…



SHARP SHOOTER

DETAILS

CONSOLE
Xbox

FROM
JOYTECH

CURRENT PRICE
£29.99

AVAILABLE
Now

Got an Xbox? Want a decent lightgun? Well, tough. With Microsoft as yet refusing to put an official Xbox lightgun on the market and the only other option being some kind of hideous green monstrosity from Mad Catz, people looking to play games like *House Of The Dead 3* and, er, *House Of The Dead 2* really haven't had much luck in satisfying their gun-blasting urges. Even now though, with the release of JOYTECH's Sharp Shooter arcade lightgun, you might think that's still the case. Sure, it's true that with its slightly-too-plastic feel and overly lightweight handling, you might be fooled into writing off the Sharp Shooter. However, given that it's the only lightgun available for the Xbox that doesn't look like a lump of toxic waste, it's compatible with all kinds of TVs (including 100Hz ones), it's reasonably cheap and actually works rather well in terms of accuracy, we can't help but recommend it. Now if only there were more games to use it with…



ADVANCED MUSIC PLAYER

DETAILS

CONSOLE
Game Boy Advance

FROM
Datel

CURRENT PRICE
£29.99

AVAILABLE
Now

Being the technologically advanced gadget types that we are, we're very much into our MP3s right now, specifically iPods, which keep us happy during stupidly long plane journeys. However, not everyone wants to blow huge amounts of money just to listen to music on the move; thankfully though, Datel has obviously realised this and stepped in to help. Enter the AMP (or Advanced Music Player, for people who hate acronyms), the first MP3 adapter for the Game Boy Advance. Obviously, it's not exactly comparable to a high-end MP3 player but then it's also not the same price as a gold brick – at £29.99 you get pretty much what you pay for, which is around 45 minutes worth of music to listen to on the move. Once you've bought it, you simply download MP3s onto it from a PC or even transfer them from another AMP via the GBA Link Cable if you know someone with the same equipment. With a pair of headphones and a GBA SP headphone adapter included in the price, it's certainly a cheaper option for quality portable music.



GB PLAYER

DETAILS

CONSOLE
GameCube

FROM
Nintendo

CURRENT PRICE
£44.99

AVAILABLE
Now

It's been out since the end of June – what do you mean you still haven't bought yourself a Game Boy Player for your 'Cube? Shame on you; while it might not seem essential, there's no denying that you need one of these to get the most out of your GBA games when you're out and about. Titles like *Advance Wars 2, Golden Sun: The Lost Age* and *Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow* deserve to be played more often than during the occasional train journey, but when you're at home it seems a waste to run down your GBA batteries. That's why the Game Boy Player is perfect. You just plug it into the bottom of your GameCube and boot up the disc that comes with it to immediately enjoy any Game Boy title – GBA, GBC or even original Game Boy – on your TV. Get one now if you haven't already done so – you know it makes sense.




eMag

F-ZERO GX™

Hang on to your hats – and just about anything else that isn't strapped down – as games™ gives you the definitive review of Nintendo's fastest racing game yet

NEXT MONTH IN games™

It's about bloody time too – just when we thought we'd have to take up some kind of outdoor activity to cope with not having anything to play, we've suddenly got games coming out the wazoo…

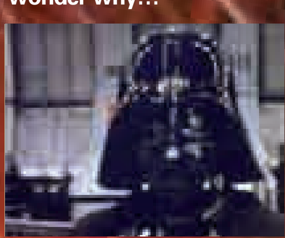
MORE… PREVIEWS

Can you believe we're already thinking about what's on the horizon for next year? We'll take a gander at what should be getting your blood pumping, as well as showing off the strength behind the Force.



MORE… REVIEWS

Yes, it's true – some good games are coming out right about now. Don't look so shocked, you knew it was coming. Luckily, we're here to separate the wheat from the chaff and help you make that buying decision.



MORE… FEATURES

Considering it's one of the biggest movie licences ever, it's no surprise that *Star Wars* has spawned more than enough games. Sadly, some have been stinkers – and you have to wonder why…

180 PAGES OF SPEED-FREAK LOVIN' ACTION



Of course, this is all just a rough estimate of what issue 10 will have – it's all subject to change, depending on how our PR friends feel. You never know, we might just pack up and go down the pub instead…

ON SALE 11 SEPT 03

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

ENOUGH WITH THE WORRYING ABOUT NINTENDO ALREADY. AND THE CONSPIRACY THEORISTS HAVE ARRIVED – TINFOIL HELMETS AT THE READY…

The demise of the old-school arcade is a sad loss for us all, although there are certain furious mothers who are probably glad to see the back of them



MAKING CONTACT

☐ **There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:**

games™
Paragon Publishing Ltd
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

☐ However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

☐ Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

☐ **Step One:**
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

☐ **Step Two:**
Type the following into the Net browser window: **www.totalgames.net**
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the forum icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

☐ **Step Three:**
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**penfold**' and we'll do the rest. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

☐ **ACCORDING TO SOME** websites, there is a global plot to keep us all poor and stupid. As the slumbering sports franchise dragon awakes once again, churning out 2004 versions of multi-platform mediocrity, I'm beginning to feel convinced that the plot is real. In fact, even the world of Hollywood (where DVDs with an extra unmemorable 17 minutes and a mumbled commentary by the director's best friend's cousin are released at extortionate prices) must gaze slack-jawed in envious amazement at the gaming industry.

Okay, for most of the Eighties and Nineties mainstream Hollywood careered along, merrily tweaking the same template again and again. Take a square-jawed action hero here, a plane hijack there, a sprinkle of bomb countdowns and a pinch of needless explosions and *voilà*! Release another 90 minutes of abject tedium to multi-million pound takings (and a range of bendable plastic characters that choke the under-fives).

But, smug as they were, even the film companies must've been startled to see an emerging world industry where a group of human beings have bought pretty much the same thing, over and over again, for the last ten years just because the year has gone up by one and they're getting 15 new leg animation frames and 40 new teams from Bolivia. Which leads to an interesting conundrum. Either the games-buying public are less intelligent than the film-loving Joes who inhabit your local Blockbuster (which seems doubtful considering the slack-jawed goons who hang around in mine), or there's something else at work.

As I gaze at the 2003 version of a famous footballing franchise, I ask myself the same question: why did I buy it? The conclusion: I've been led to believe by the games industry marketing machine that sports games aren't an event, or an item to be bought and used forever, but a consumable item like toilet paper or a set of disposable razors – I buy some, use them for a while, then have to go out and buy another set. Only this time they're quilted or twice as absorbent, or have six blades instead of three. And rather like a set of disposable razors, I expect the same look of disdain and snorted dismissal when I attempt to trade my earlier versions of said franchise for the latest model: "Look, I'll give you £3.50 and a punch in the face for it, but I'm being generous mate."

Our only hope is that Hollywood doesn't cotton on to us, because I know I'm weak. And *Ace Ventura Pet Detective 2004* with more accurately rendered parrots, commentary from John Motson and a music score from Ms Dynamite seems very tempting…

Ben Thomas

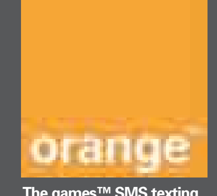
games™: Like an addict in need of a fix, gamers

"THE GUY IN CHARGE OF THE ARCADE WOULDN'T GIVE THE WOMAN HER MONEY BACK SO SHE WENT OVER TO THE SUPER SPRINT MACHINE AND PULLED IT OVER"

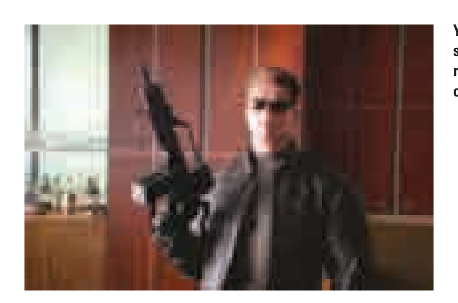
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You never get multiple sequels or simple rehashes with movies. Of course, you don't…

continue to buy sequels, variants on a similar theme and games that we know aren't great but are cheap or second-hand. But while we can bemoan all of this and pine for originality in videogames, could you really just stop buying games tomorrow? You see, like Pavlov's dogs we can't help ourselves and are programmed to buy the latest game that we have been convinced is going to offer us that little bit more. But, like the odd good movie or great album, every once in a while a game is released and it all seems worth it and, let's face it, we're willing victims, aren't we?

☐ **CONGRATULATIONS ON THE** best retro section to grace any mag – ah, the memories! Anyway, I would like to see a section on the retro arcade scene, stories of what arcades used to be like 'in the good old days' with rows and rows of classic games like *Bubble Bobble*, *Rygar*, *Black Tiger* and so on – not these £2 for two minutes efforts that you get today!

It would be interesting to hear people's stories of the old arcades, what they were like and what games they remember. I remember one where a very annoyed lady came in with her slippers on, upset at the fact that her 12-year-old son had spent the £2.50 she had given him for the shopping (you used to get a lot for your money in them days) on a bandit – *Hyper Vyper*, I think.

This guy in charge of the arcade wouldn't give her the money back and after a couple of minutes of hitting the change kiosk window with her slipper she went over to the *Super Sprint* machine and pulled it over (those things are heavy), then she moved onto the *Ghost 'N Goblins* and then *Rygar* machines (I was a bit gutted, to be honest, as I was next to play on it). All went over with glass and joysticks everywhere. Eventually, the police came and after she had thrown both slippers at them she was carted off. You don't get lunch breaks like that these days…

Lee Sinyard

games™: We did touch briefly on the halcyon days of the arcade in issue 4, but would love to hear more stories of old-school arcade action. Can anyone top this? And it seems other people are bothered by the state of today's arcades…

☐ **I THOUGHT I** would write in this month to ask you your opinion on an area of gaming that is enjoyed by almost everyone: the arcade. The arcade was once a very sociable place to meet, drink and play games. It seems, however, that the arcade is dying. Though developers such as SEGA are thinking of ways to innovate the way we play our arcade games, making games more physical, exciting and generally more interactive, I can't help but feel their efforts are wasted.

My theory is that with so many arcade games these days coming to home consoles that recreate the power of the arcade in the living room at a lower cost, there is just no business for the arcade anymore. Sure, holidaymakers will spend a quick buck in the arcade, but is this enough to save a dying area of today's gaming world?

Sammy Barker

games™: We mourn the passing of the old arcades though we still make use of our local amusement arcade whenever a new game



CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

TEXT LIFE...

☐ Unimpressed with the latest game previews and reviews – counted 25 of the 34 games discussed with violence as the main theme.
Hey, don't, er, shoot the messenger.

☐ Why can't people who write text messages to your magazine speak properly? Is it just because I'm old that 'text speak' seems to be complete gibberish?
Vowels are so passé, innit?

☐ How on earth have you missed Burning Rangers off your SEGA Saturn group of pictures in issue 8?
We chose the games that we wanted to show and, well, *Burning Rangers* wasn't one of them.

☐ Ha! I've just noticed that in your Ikaruga review, you only showed screenshots up to level two - does that mean you're as good at it as I am?
So, we get castigated for proving that we we're completing games and then criticised for not showing shots of all the levels. You can't win…

☐ What does SEGA stand for?
Quality games at affordable prices – or SErvice GAmes. Either way, we're right…

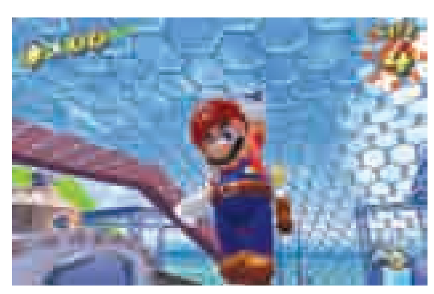
☐ How about a feature on the Video Genie? Valkyrie and Taipan were classics — or am I just older than I thought?
We'll see if we can sort something out…

☐ Four pages on phone gaming, but no Doom 7650 or E-Mame P800? You're better than that! Phone gaming goes much further! Any chance of a more educating part two?
Perhaps. Mobile gaming is evolving all the time so it's something we'll probably look at again in the near future.

☐ Is it strange that I've kept every single game and console that I've owned in the past 13 years since the age of five? My friend doesn't even have the games he bought last week.
Does your friend buy games™? Didn't think he did…

☐ Start giving out posters wiv your mag!
You're thinking of another mag, surely? You'll be after stickers next.

☐ Why has no-one heard of Solstice on the NES? It was brill and had a less brill sequel called Equinox on the SNES.
Some people do remember it. For starters, you do…





appears, in spite of the extortionate costs. As you say, the power of consoles, the costs involved and, some argue, the lack of truly classic arcade games have conspired to drag the arcade into the doldrums and we cannot see an arcade revival anytime soon. Still, with arcade games aplenty available on all consoles and emulators to remind us of the classics, there's still plenty to enjoy cheaply in the comfort of your own home and, aside from nostalgia, it's possibly better that way – after all, you don't get demented housewives pushing over the computer in your home (well, you might…).

☐ **WHOSE BITCH? NOT** you, of course. I refer to the article in issue 8 of your wonderful tome. Page 16 to be precise, and the article about the IDSA [the Interactive Digital Software Association, which vigorously opposes attempts to stop under-17s buying 'mature' games]. I'm wondering precisely what service the IDSA (now the Entertainment Software Association, I believe) exists to provide to the gaming industry in the USA. I've seen them championed as a step forward for games in the US – a genuine contender for a governing body for the industry (something that is sorely needed) and yet I can't understand the benefit of them challenging the Missouri state law as detailed in your article.

Surely the proper policing of selling 'mature' content titles to minors is something that anyone with the needs of the industry at heart should be doing everything in their power to promote? Something to keep the liberals at bay and show the world in general that we do care about the possible – although as yet unproven – influence that mature games could have on the younger audience?

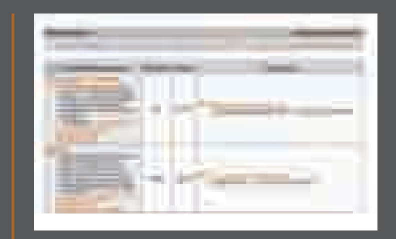
The only possible motives I can think for this happening are that, firstly, they want to totally govern the industry and control all that goes on within it in much the same way that the BBFC controls other media formats in this country. That makes sense, I guess, but I can't help but think that the main benefactors of their actions are those companies that benefit directly from the 'grey' area surrounding the sale of 'M' rated games to those that shouldn't be able to get hold of them.

Is it possible that the ESA is a little too close to some companies in the industry? Or is it more likely that I've been reading too many conspiracy theory features for my own good, and I'm reading too much into the whole thing?
Steve Rust

games™: Banning mature games wholesale is never the answer, in much the same way as banning other adult media would not be tolerated. Children have a right to be protected from unsuitable media but the point that ESA was making was that it should be the parents or guardians and the retailers taking that responsibility and not any kind of governing body – it's something that we thoroughly support.

☐ **SO, THE GAMECUBE** has been under-performing and Nintendo says that it will correct its mistakes and that the next machine will be a winner. But what do you guys think people would pick if they had a choice between the PS3 and GC? I believe that the majority of gamers will opt for the PS3, the safe option. Sure, Nintendo says that its new machine will be impressive but so will Sony and Microsoft.

Nintendo did really well with the initial price of



FROM THE FORUM

What do your friends think of gaming?

Numpty
Kids have it easy. I'm a golden oldie and some of my circle of friends play videogames and clearly love them but are ashamed to admit it in company. If pushed they will play down how much they indulge in or enjoy gaming. I think the rest think I am utterly insane for playing videogames and have no concept of the fun to be had. Thank God that I bred my own set of avid gamers who bring all their friends to our house for multiplayer madness. What say you my gaming buddies?

Koffdrop
My closest circle of friends are all full-on gamers. In fact, that's probably why we became friends in the first place! I'm glad to say that I've very successfully managed to get my girlfriend(s) thoroughly hooked on various games too. I think the reception towards gaming that I get is not so shameful as it became my job – so there's more ways for it to sneak into conversation and, thankfully, others can appreciate the care and dedication that goes into making and playing them. On the whole, I find those who don't snap to ill-informed judgement calls very receptive towards gaming.

Hong Kong Phooey
Very few of my friends play videogames. A couple of them might play *FIFA* on their PS2 every now and again, but that's about it. The rest of them are either getting drunk every night or working seven days a week to provide for their wife and 2.2 children. 'Are you ever going to grow out of games?' is the usual question I get asked. They seem to think it's a phase I'm going through. If it is a phase, it's a very long one – 27 years and counting.

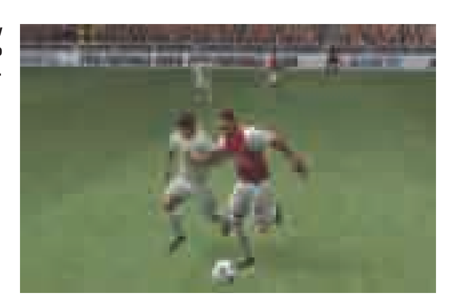
omusremit
I don't have friends… Actually, that's a lie – some of them tolerate it, some of them are as avid gamers as me. I think you can tell the difference by when if you talk about *Final Fantasy* the ones who get the glazed look are the ones who merely tolerate it. As for my significant other – well, luckily for me she enjoys it as well. Which was nice.

bmxgamer
Some of my friends are gamers – however, they are 'PS2 only' gamers. The friends that aren't gamers don't really care about it. Most of my friends are long-time friends (friends I made before and during primary school). BMXing has made me a load of friends as well. I have only ever made one friend from gaming.

cumby
Well, I'm the only hard-core gamer amongst my friends – some play and some none at all, but none of 'em are into games as much as me – well, apart from my work colleagues who discuss goings on in the games industry. My close friends aren't really bothered about my addictions to games – they've adapted to it, and if they're bored they come round for a quick bash on the multiplayer games – that's the only type they all prefer. I'm not ashamed to be an addictive gamer, in a way I think it helps expand your imagination. I still wear my *Mario Sunshine*, *Kingdom Hearts*, GameCube and *Jak & Daxter* t-shirts with pride.

Brian Bloodaxe
Most of my friends are gamers, but then I met most of my friends through table-top role-playing games so we are probably not the best example. And if you think that computer gaming gets a lot of flak from the masses try explaining to people why you enjoy sitting round a table with four of your friends telling stories for four to ten hours every week.

FIFA 2004 – you know that you're going to have to buy it…



the GameCube, but Nintendo's budget for creating new consoles is considerably smaller than both Sony and Microsoft's. The reason? Both companies have funds coming from sources other than console manufacture. Microsoft, with all its PC software and accessories, and Sony, being the biggest and most well-known electrical entertainment company in the world, generate more than enough cash to sustain any losses in the console market. The only main source of profit Nintendo gets is from videogames, mainly from the GBA but even that market is now under threat from the Sony PSP.

'But the Game Boy has beaten off every competitor it's faced,' I hear you say. How is Nintendo expected to turn itself around when people think like this? Which brings me to my main point – do you think Nintendo should look elsewhere for profits as well as the videogames industry in order to be in direct competition with Sony and Microsoft so it can produce a powerful console and can afford to lose money on it? Face it, it's not like how it used to be – people want their console to do more than just play videogames, and would you buy a TV or DVD player made by Nintendo?
Cumby

games™: Another month and another letter regarding the plight of Nintendo. Let's get this straight – Nintendo makes a lot of money from all manner of things, as well as videogames. Think about it. How about Pokémon? Not just the games but also the T-shirts, books, bags and so on. You can also be sure that whatever Nintendo's current situation with the GameCube and GBA, it is still making money and has enough money in the bank to continue developing consoles and games.

EVERYONE SEEMS TO think games are getting easier these days, and maybe they're correct, but it could also be the fact that we as players are getting better. I mean, the people that say this have generally been playing games for about ten years (at least) and would have been quite young when they first began to play games, so they might have had more difficulty finishing games than when they were 20. It is not simply games getting easier but games players getting better, as we are all a lot older now than when we first started playing games. What do you think?
Ross Taylor

games™: It's an interesting point – we often hear from distressed gamers who say that games are too easy these days, but maybe the gamers are just too good. It would be nice to think that, like fine wines, gamers improve with age. Your thoughts, dear readers?

"SHOULD NINTENDO LOOK OUTSIDE THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY FOR PROFITS SO IT CAN PRODUCE A POWERFUL CONSOLE AND CAN AFFORD TO LOSE MONEY ON IT?"

CONTINUE



PUSH START BUTTON

